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迷宮を
彷徨う

生まれ変わった俺は

自動販売機に

I REINCARNATED INTO A VENDING MACHINE

– Jidō hanbai ki ni umarekawatta ore wa meikyū ni hōkō –

- Volume 2 -

AUTHOR:

昼クマ

[Translated by: Hon'yaku]

CHAPTER 26

TOGETHER WITH YOU

“Hakkon ... don’t go off anywhere anymore ...”

Since then, after we were pulled up, we rested in a corner of the fortress. Ramis’ high-tension seemed to have been cut and, leaning against me, she fell asleep. It looks like while I wasn’t around she searched for me without sleeping.

“Ramis is way dependent on Hakkon, *na*. Being all freaked out like this ... yeah, definitely because of THAT time back then.”

THAT time back then? Something that bothers me just came out of Hyurumi’s mouth.

“Too bad.”

“Aa, you don’t know anything about it. *Maa*, it’s ok to tell Hakkon, I guess. Me and Ramis are from the same village; the childhood friends thing.”

I see. They look like complete opposites, but they say people with polar opposite personalities can unexpectedly get along well, *na*.

“*Maa*, it’s a story ya hear a lot. Village with little to no reputation gets attacked by monsters and disappears. Me and Ramis are one of the few survivors ... *maa*, y’know, both our parents is dead.”

Ramis has some childish tendencies, and I thought she behaved like a spoiled child in places, but she might have unconsciously been looking for someone she could rely on like a foster parent in me.

“For me, *maa*, I got this kind of personality so I’m good, but for that chick, even though she got all that power, she was so scared she couldn’t do nothing, and she always regretted it. She so dumb, even though she can’t even kill a bug she wants to be a Hunter, she’s an idiot.”

Her words are sharp, but her voice contains thankfulness towards the other party.

Certainly her super-strength is an ability that suits a Hunter, but to be honest, Ramis' personality conflicts with it and doesn't suit. When she was working at the inn and clearing away the rubble, she honestly looked like she was having fun; if it's possible, I'd rather her not return to the dangers of being a Hunter.

"Hakkon, is right now a good time?"

"Welcome."

O, the Bear President is here too. When I look, these guys attacked the base with roughly only ten people, but within the members there are also figures of the Fools of Whimsy Brigade as well. While the Leader and Vice-Leader are taking a break, they seem to be interested in what's going on over here.

"Ramis is asleep, huh? It looks like her fatigue has been adding up, so let her sleep like this. I want to apologize for this time's matter. We had already received information that this bandit group was aiming at yourself¹. In order to catch all of them in one swoop, we had planned to ask for yourself's cooperation to act as bait the next day, but those guys moved faster, and so that's how this situation came to be. Even so, we fully intended to come help, and I gave orders for yourself to be tailed. Even though we were tracking them down, the fact that we allowed yourself to be exposed to danger doesn't change. Our apologies."

The Bear President lowered his head deeply. It's all more or less what I expected, so I wasn't surprised, nor did any anger well up. And in the end, by not obstructing my abduction, I had gotten the chance to meet and save Hyurumi.

If they weren't able to abduct me, she would have probably been disposed of or taken away to somewhere else. Since that's the case, no harm, no foul.

"Welcome."

"With regards to this time's matter, a reward will come out from our side.

Furthermore, the next when anything happens to yourself, we promise that the Hunter Association will hold nothing back to assist yourself.”

Just getting the connections with the Association as a powerful ally is more than enough of an award.

“Shit-, get off. You bastards, you intending to steal my money hoard-?!”

That yelling voice is those guys’ boss-man. When I moved my sight towards him, those guys are there, tied up with rope and gathered together. Nearby there’s also bodies that aren’t moving lying down; corpses, huh. There’s one of the rooms’ guards. Even though I’m looking at peoples’ corpses, my heart isn’t disturbed in the slightest. This is probably another why I’ve changed after becoming a vending machine.

“Oi oi, you’re worried about your money over your life? You’re sure carefree, *nee. Maa*, the Hunter Association will use your huge stash of money effectively. No worries.”

While tracing the brim of his hat with his finger, Leader Keryoil said that in a slow way and rubbed his sleepy-looking eyes.

I’m happy to have been helped out, but now I owe the Fools of Whimsy Brigade one. I won’t do anything that gives me a bad feeling, though. A, Leader-san, most of that guy’s stashed coins are inside my body. I feel like he’ll get mad if he finds out.

Maa, in any case, with this the abduction incident is over. Now all that’s left is to wait for morning and, relying on that girl’s comfortable back, return.

Nooow then, shall we give the good ladies and gentlemen who participated a huge feast? Since I’ve added on the mode to heat frozen foods, I can put out grilled rice balls, kara’age, fries, fried rice, fried soba, and fried octopus dumplings. Since the frozen food manufacturer is a famous one, even though it’s from a vending machine I guarantee its taste.

By the way, my recommendation is the kara’age.

“O-, Hakkon’s shape just changed. What’s with these delicious-looking pictures of food?”

“Aren’t these all foods that we’ve never seen before now?”

“You guys, calm down. It might be dangerous. First the Leader, that is me, should try it out.”

“Not faaaaaair! Leader, you’re being unfair!”

“Oppression! A brigade that doesn’t treasure its subordinates will never grow!”

In front of me, pushing aside the lined up hunters, Leader Keryoil had cut in line, but his brigade members clung to him to block his movements.

“A-, crap. You guys, I’ll reduce your reward this time for this -.”

“What are you idiots doing? Hakkon-san, it looks like there’s nothing in the prices. Could it be, you’re treating us?”

“Welcome.”

“Thank you very much. Well then, I wonder if this meat lump is a fried dish, this one.”

Ignoring the Leader and brigade members horsing around, the Vice-Leader Filmina-san pushed the button for kara’age.

“Thank you very much.”

“O, oi, Filmina, how could you just casually cut in line?”

“Vice-Leader Filmina, how unfair”

“This meat, it’s unbelievably tender, *ne*. When you bite down, the meat juices from inside come spilling out .. *haaaa*”

The Vice-Leader Filmuna, who always had a cold image, is resting her hand on her cheek with a broad smile. In front of that ecstatically happy face, the other Hunters,

like they couldn't wait any longer, stretched out their fingers one by one.

Yes, yes, don't quarrel, there's enough. Everyone, eat and drink to your heart's content. I'm not providing alcohol, but other than that, I'll put out whatever you want.

"These guys gathering around Hakkon, they getting so damn happy. That ain't something even humans can do this easy."

Hyurumi, with her black coat closed for once, lightly tapped my body, *clang clang*.

It was just a casual statement, but inside me it felt like something hot had quietly slipped in. Since my body is mechanical, this kind of feeling probably shouldn't exist, but I want to believe that this warm feeling isn't my imagination.

Just providing the Hunters who continue to eat and drink gives me a feeling of happiness; rather than a vending machine that has become aware, it's the obvious sentiment of a person. With these feelings, as long as I never forget this sensation, I will continue from hereon out doing the duties of a vending machine.

"Hakkooooon... we'll always ... be together ... zzz"

Ramis' sleep-talk, huh? With a happy-looking sleeping face, she curled up into a ball like a cat.

Aa, until the day that you wish to be separated from me, let's stay together.

Without any accidents on the way, we reached the community.

At my safe return from the thieves' hideout, the gatekeepers, Karios and Gols, greeted me, thrilled that I'm back. Furthermore, once I returned to the front of the Hunter Association, customers came one after another, people crammed in to the point you couldn't see them in the nearby areas.

Somehow, it appears there's people who can't calm down without having my products everyday, so the number of people who bought large amounts of stuff isn't few. Gazing out over the customers neatly lined up, in a place a bit away from us, with her eyes glinting, is the money-exchanger, Akoui-san, her glasses giving off a suspicious light.

She's writing something at blazing speeds into a notepad she's holding. It's probably something like I have way more than enough money stashed up so they can go recover the silver coins.

Despite the fact that we returned early in the morning, the line didn't break even when it became night; when I dealt with the last customer, it was well into the time that could be called late night.

"Good work today too, Hakkon."

From behind me I heard a familiar voice. Ramis lined up next to me.

What did she come to do this late at night; if I was normal then this would probably be that surprising scene, but if you think about it calmly there's a reason for this. She was always there. Today, all day, she was always nearby.

Of course when she had to take care of business she would leave me, but even then, the furthest distance she took away from me was not more than 5 meters. And then, right now she's tucked up in a sleeping bag with only her face showing. She looks like a brown cod-fish egg with just a human head, smiling happily.

My abduction seems to be haunting her, so she decided that tonight she definitely wouldn't leave me and she would sleep outside. Hyurumi and Munami both wanted to join her, but she stubbornly refused them.

Looks like the Bear President is also worried, since there's a guard standing watch in the entrance of the Hunter Association that has never been there before, keeping watch in our direction.

"Hakkon too, since a lot has happened and you're probably tired, you better sleep."

"Welcome."

Since it seems like that's all for today, I shut off the lights.

It's been a while since she and I had been separated, but there's no vending machine that receives this kind of over-excessive worrying, you know? So then, until Ramis

realizes this, let's keep her company.

“Before we sleep, is it fine to talk to you?”

Of course. If you're fine with me who can only play the listener's role, I'll accompany you however much you want.

While listening to the girl happily talking, I switched my gaze to the sky, and there the night sky was spread out. We're inside a dungeon that's just like outside, but it looks like there's nothing like stars. Even though there's a sun.

Gazing at the mysterious view of the dungeon that doesn't use Japan's common sense, aa, it really feels like I've come home.

With the me who's acquainting myself with my heart's true feelings, Ramis, with her entire face beaming happily with no signs of stopping, continued talking until the evening went somewhere far away.

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1. onushi – just another way to say “you”, so translating it to “yourself”

CHAPTER 27

THE DEVOTION TO YOU

My field of vision violently shakes up and down, right and left. And, once in a while, the scenery gets blown away at high speeds.

“Hakkon, it’s just a bit longer until lunch, so we’ll take a break *ne*.”

I hear the voice of Ramis, who’s energetically in the midst of reconstruction work today as well, from a very close distance. Since I’m on her back, of course she’s close, but wouldn’t it be fine to put me down?

I just got back from being kidnapped, so Ramis is always by my side. Though I had been installed on the ground during reconstruction up until now, for some reason I’m being carried on her back. The time she let me go is, other than the times she has to go to the toilet, we’re pretty much together the whole day.

It’s not that I dislike it, but ... isn’t her attachment too strong?

“You guys be getting along a little *too* well. Yo, Hakkon, doing well?”¹

The one raising her hand lightly and coming closer is Hyurumi, wearing her black coat today as well. As always, she seems indifferent to her attire and fashion, and her scruffy hair is suitably tied back.

If the time when she was the neatest was when she was kidnapped and confined, what does that say?

“A-, Hyurumi. You look fine now. You don’t feel tired anymore?”

“Oo. Or like, when I was shut up I ate some damn tasty stuff, so I’m full of energy.”

These two really do seem to get along well; everyday she aims to come and meet us around break time.

Fundamentally, it gives off the feeling of Hyurumi being the smart older sister, but

sometimes it's an amusing relationship where Ramis asks about her body's wellbeing while acting like a mother.

"But man, how about letting Hakkon down when you're working? Ain't he in the way?"

"I'm perfectly fine, you know. Because I have more than enough strength, and if I don't have something about as heavy as Hakkon my body is too light, and actually it gets tough to move."

U-n, your reasons aren't that alone, *na*. I'm happy that you're worried about me, but over-protection, or like, the degree of your worry is way too much. It would probably be better to do something about this.

"But ya know, look, if Ramis be right there all the time, ain't there gonna be customers who'll pull back?"

"A, *uu-*. But, if I leave him, he could get kidnapped again."

"Hakkon'll be super careful this time. Right?"

"Welcome."

"U,u-n. If Hakkon says so, then"

She does it reluctantly, but Ramis sets me on the ground; with a displeased face, her cheeks are puffing out a little. With this I've secured a little bit of private time, too. Good job Hyurumi.

To be perfectly honest, being constantly carried caused my sales to drop quite a bit. Well yeah, a vending machine violently moving on someone's back is going to be a hassle for anyone with the guts to try to buy products. The two gatekeepers called out once, and so she stopped so they could buy something, though

Ramis keeps sneaking side glances, looking away from the work she was doing to a point where I was worried she would hurt herself.

I'm doing pretty good over here; the customers that have been hesitating to stretch out their hands up until now gathered in front of me. Alright, now it's time to make back the potential losses.

I sold way more than I expected to at lunchtime; I restocked the things that liked like they'd sell well; since the products are just about all made hot, in order to avoid them going stale, they sat down right in front of the Hunter Association.

When it became evening, up until now Ramis stayed by my side and ate vending machine products, but the mindful Hyurumi came and fetched her over to Munami and Okami-san's temporarily established eatery.

Around this time it's the usual lull in people, so for the first time in a while I'm a person – – I mean, a machine, by himself leisurely spending the time, when someone came walking through with his head hanging down.

That is, one of the three morning regulars, the young male merchant *na*. Even though he's always floating an aimless, pleasant smile, and gives off the good impression of have pleasant manners towards the old couple, it's like he's giving off a black aura surrounding his body, he's depressed to that degree.

“Haa... it's not going well, *naa*. Recently it's been busier than ever. My chances to talk to her are ... even though tomorrow's her birthday.”

Listening to his breathy muttering, I've come to an understanding. I'm pretty sure this guy had fallen for the inn's poster girl, Munami. He'd like the relationship to progress, but he's worried whether it will go well. So it's love worries, huh; I'd love to discuss it with him, but feedback is currently not my specialty.

“Haa, Hakkon-san, recently I've been worried that I can't focus.”

From the exact opposite direction of the young merchant approached an extra-large gori ... is the money-exchanger's assistant, Goggai.

In spite of his looks, that person is gentle, and previously he had watched over a crying child who had fallen until he stood up, and with a “That's really admirable, standing

up all by yourself,” he smiled warmly; he’s that sort of person.

“Oh, it’s the money-exchanger’s Goggai-san, isn’t it?”

“Oh my. For your assistance several days ago, thank you.”

Since the two of them are acquaintances, they greeted each other lightly. *Maa*, for a merchant and a money-exchanger to have had contact before isn’t unthinkable. They talked about rumors of the weather and business, exchanging the type of harmless small-talk that neither feels too invested in, and it felt like I was watching a crappy play.

From time to time, both would steal glances in my direction. Apparently, both of them would like to buy something, but even though it should be fine to buy whatever product you’d like even if there’s an onlooker, I should probably do something.

“Welcome.”

“A-, would you like something to drink? Let me get it for you.” (merchant)

“No no, I’ve been in Hakkon-san’s care, so I will.” (Goggai)

The two of them repeated the “Let me”s and “I will”s. Normally speaking, the “Then, I-
“ “Go ahead” flow would have been the perfect chance to break out of it, though.

“The, this time I will buy it, and the next time we meet I will leave it up to you; is that fine?” (merchant)

“Understood. I thank you for this time.” (Goggai)

The young merchant drank his usual milk tea, and Goggai drank his usual lemon tea. Both of them chose hot drinks. The season is like early winter, the season when hot drinks are delicious, after all. We’re in a dungeon but there are seasons, it’s a little late to be having problems with it.

“Haa, it’s very calming, *ne*.” (merchant)

“Hakkon-san really has all sorts of delicious products, so it can be troubling to choose one.” (Goggai)

Even though it’s just the act of drinking something hot together, it feels like the distance between them has gotten a little shorter. Their conversation is livelier than before.

“By the way, this might be a bit rude ...but you had a somewhat serious looking face before.” (Goggai)

“Ah, how embarrassing. It’s just, that’s, girl-related worries.” (merchant)

“Is that what it was. Would you like to talk about it? If you say your worries out loud, they will feel a little less severe. *Aa-*, that’s right. I also have worries about being Akoui-san’s assisnt, so if it would be alright with you, I’d be grateful if you listened to me afterwards.”

I see; if there’s the situation that Goggai-san will speak frankly about his worries after, it makes it easier for the young merchant to talk. Akoui-san has a severe personality that doesn’t seem like the type to do well with negotiations, so he’s probably forever cleaning up after her.

“Actually, I have an unrequited love for this woman, and I have obtained information that her birthday is very soon, but I can’t think about what would be best to do. I’d like to hand her a present, but we’re not that close at all since I’m just another customer, so I don’t know if she’d be happy to receive it.”

“I see, that is certainly a problem to worry about, *ne*. Even if the present is expensive, it doesn’t mean it would be suitable. If you were at the level of being quite intimate, there are always gemstones or jewelry, but as a regular customer, if you suddenly handed something like that over, it would give a strange impression.”

“It’s like that, *ne*. It’s embarrassing to say, but because I was doing business so much, I have no experience in love; to be able to come up with the optimal answer to this is something that’s beyond me.”

Because he's young man who's way to serious, he's probably lived a life with nothing to do with love affairs.

If she was an easy girl, like the ones that are often in contrived stories and games, if you handed anything of value over, even if she says, "E, I can't take something like this," she'll accept it in the end and her feelings for you would soar. But Munami is used to the guys would pull that sort of thing, so even if she accepted it with a smile, that's it for you.

"In this case, what a normal woman would be pleased with is something that's moderately priced."

"So it's like that after all. I thought so as well, so I came here. I had heard a rumor that when Hakkon-san hears of someone's wishes, he'll stock a new product that's somewhat suitable."

"A-, I've heard of that as well. Products and shape as well will change ... This is only between you and me, but in the night business, at Shirley-san's place, the contraception-like thing that they use was provided from Hakkon-san."

So that was where the information leaked out from. At some point that urban legend, or community legend, rose to the surface. The time of the self-aware vending machine is now.

"Why don't you try it and request something from Hakkon-san. I'm also interested."

"That's true. Even if it's impossible, I won't be any worse off; Hakkon-san, did you hear about what we were talking about?"

"Welcome."

"Then the explanation will be quick. Is there some product suitable for a lady's birthday present?"

I've been thinking the entire time while I was listening, and there was only one thing

that came to mind.

It's fine that the community became lively while in the middle of reconstruction, but, how should I say this, they don't really have a lot of extra to work with. It's not like they have a shortage of necessary goods, but the feeling that there's more and more than enough for leisure can't be imagined at all.

It might be ideal for hunters and merchants, but it's not a community where it's easy to flatter a girl. In that case, here is the new product that I can provide --

"There's light... e, he changed his appearance again, *ne*. E, these are, flowers?" (merchant)

"You can't get such a splendid arrangement of flowers here. Since this level has a lot of wetlands *ne*. I have never seen such exquisite flowers before." (Goggai)

That's right, I'm a flower vending machine. I've changed into mostly glass walls with many divisions, and in there flowers are lined up. And I can't stock them unless I've had experience buying them, so the variety of flowers that I've purchased for Mother's Day are carnations, roses, the bouquets you'd bring for visiting graves, and lilies. By the way, I did have the experiences where my mother handed me some money right before I went to buy them.

Since it's in the midst of reconstruction, the things in town are buildings and debris in droves. I don't remember seeing flowers at all. In such a community, if you hand over such colorful flowers, a woman who'd have ill feelings about it won't exist ... I think.

"I see, so flowers. The price is also modest. This is perfect!"

"I believe Akoui-san likes white flowers. I will also purchase some."

The two bought flowers as they thought best. The young merchant bought bouquets. Goggai bought white lilies.

The appearance of two men holding bunches of flowers somehow give off a warm feeling, though it might just be me.

The two men with their hands full of flowers, looking sideways out of the corners of their eyes at the ground, embarrassed, bowed their heads and took their leave. If it goes well for both of them, that would be good. For a while, let's be attentive and try to gather information together.

"Hakkon, did you know?"

Several days have passed since then. It seems it's just before the usual winter comes, so the residents are in a hurry preparing to pass through the winter. I'm in my usual spot doing my sales, when Ramis suddenly asked that.

I have absolutely no idea what she's talking about, so I put out a "Too bad."

"Um, you see. Munami and Okami-san right now, they're in a tent doing their eatery, right? Right now, that place has become really popular with girls. Why do you think that is?"

Even if you say that, *na*. The information was so little that I'm troubled as to how to respond. For an eatery to become popular, the reason would be the taste, usually. But the part about it being popular with girls interests me. Originally, since two women run the management, I've heard that female hunters and residents find it easy to come. So that said, there must have been something that further meets the demands of female customers. I have no idea.

"Too bad."

"You wouldn't know, *ne*. Actually, in Munami's eatery, see, there's pretty flowers set up as decorations. And they're super super pretty flowers. Just looking at them soothes you –"

O-, the young merchant has come to buy them frequently since then so he often commuted from here to there. Oh yeah, several days ago when the money-exchanger Akoui-san came too, her sharp face was just a little softer. So the effect was immediate. So Ramis like flowers. I saw the sparkle in her eye when she was telling me the story. If that's the case, there's that, yeah.

“Wa-, wh,what happened, why did you change shape so suddenly ... E-, these flowers, Hakkon is selling them?”

Now in flower vending mode, I brought out a pink carnation and dropped it down.

“Ee-, you’re giving me one too!? Thanks Hakkon. I’ll treasure it.”

Hugging it, she happily spun around in circles. If she’s going to be that happy with it, it was worth making it a present. Did you know, Ramis. In the flower language, the pink colored carnation means “gratitude”.

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1. getting along *too* well – literally, getting along at a degree that makes other people pull back a little (in disgust/awkwardness)

CHAPTER 28

THREAT

There were four wall-mounted candle holders installed in this room.

In the middle of the gloomy room there was a enormous round table; surrounding that were 13 shadowy people lined up.

Silence reigned with no one opening their mouths in this place, when a single woman suddenly stood up.

“Everyone, thank you for gathering together. Our regular meeting will begin. The topic this time is of course – – THATyo.”

At whatever suspicious thing the word THAT means, all present began to make a fuss.

“It can’t be; that THAT’s reach has extended this far.”

“Aa, we were careless.”

“If we don’t work out a counterplan, we’ll be wiped out in an instant.”

Dangerous words leaked out of their mouths one by one, and anguished groans were heard as well.

Whomever the thin light shone on, their faces were dark and lifeless feeling.

“Quiet down. Right now we’ll sum up all the information we know at present ... if you would yo.”

The woman prompted her seated neighbor, a woman with an apron-skirt, maid-like get up, who now stood, opening the documents in her hand.

“Well then, THAT has captured 70% of this Dungeon’s level and has them under their control, supplying them. And this time, his reach has even come this far. We, as of now, must unite, or we will never be able to remove THAT. And so, this time, as a trump card, we have called this gentleman in. Well then, would you give a statement?”

“Welcome.”

I, who was forced to participate in the assembly of all the owners of businesses in Seiryu¹ Lake Level's community's food and drink industry, can't say anything other than this, you know.

This assembly commences three times a year on pre-determined dates; they also talk about serious matters, but in general, they swap rumors and afterwards finish it with idle chit-chat.

However, this time it's a special, hurriedly formed assembly, and all the members' faces are tense without a smidgeon of room for error. Just by looking you can tell it's a desperate situation; it's honestly really uncomfortable.

“If there's anything you'd like to add, Hakkon-san, you're welcome to speak up at any time.”

Munami adding “-san” is really creepy. This person; so she's the type to get really into her role, huh? She's giving off the image of some high-ranking guy's secretary.

“Let us continue the discussion. Currently, this community has a large amount of all sorts of people flooding in. Our population has swelled by about one hundred people, and right now they say that we're close to five hundred residents.”

“Recently it's become lively, *naa*.”

“Originally this should be something we're happy about, but”

Because the community is experiencing a shortage of manpower due to the reconstruction work, if they don't at least prepare the gate before the full brunt of winter hits, the people around will have a hard time getting in and out. At least we got the wall of spikes set up to defend us against enemies, what a relief; that's the degree things are at.

“The people increased, so the food and drink business is delighted ... is how it should

be, but forget about that, THAT's is going to make its move. With its goal to dominate all of the Dungeon's food, the absolute strongest and the worst eatery – – the Chain Restaurant²-!"

"Dammit, even though I thought I could finally make a profit because they're not here-!"

"As for me, even though I went to a different level, THAT's going to steal away all the food demand!"

While gazing at the food and drink merchants making a fuss like they're the protagonists of some tragedy, I piece together their discussion in my head.

So basically, in this dungeon, each level has its own community where people gather, and in each community there's a major food and drink shop that sets up a branch. In other words, it's a chain store.

Up until now, because the population hadn't even reached one hundred, they thought the profits would be weak, and so they hadn't touched this community. However, with seeing the recent population inflation, they decided that the time to rake in the profits was now.

It looks like the name of this big chain store is Chain Restaurant. For them to set up branch stores is an unthinkable ambition for other food and drink businesses; their food and drink is good of course, but with preserved foods and easily carried foods assembled as well, "Everything is served at Chain Restaurant" is their catchphrase.

Chain Restaurant gets resupplied directly from contracted farmers, so without the middle man, the possibility of making quality food for less is possible. The managers handle the transfers and connections with traders, they can get food transported for the lowest price possible; the price for the quality is at a situation where the ordinary eateries can't cross swords with them.

And so, Chain Restaurant establishing a branch shop in a community means that other eateries can only wait to be crushed.

This is a lot like a story from modern day Japan, *na*. A big store is erected, and all the

shopping districts and small retailers all in a row are shut down; how many precedents have there been?

“THAT was aiming for this time of season, I bet. To prepare for winter, we are all agonizing over the high price that our food dealings should be set at; this is the time they’re waiting for. On THAT’s side, they possess magic tools capable of storing large amounts of fresh food, so even though it’s winter, they’re able to continue offering the same food without changing.”

In other words, the big store has something like a refrigerator, I guess.

Here, about 80% of the eateries are food stalls, so there’s no way they’d have something like that. ‘We need to restock our supplies, so today we’re closed’; that’s expected around here.

“And to prepare for the transfer, THAT’s hand had most likely stretched far; they’ve begun blatantly raising the prices and stopping the supplies from coming. We are seriously being driven into a corner.”

“Dammiiiiit, does that mean we can only be destroyed-?!”

“I’ve got cute kids at home, you know. How am I supposed to get through the winter?”

Banging their fists on the table, the actions of the frustrated shopkeepers are – – like they’re putting on a play. *Glance, glance*, they keep sneaking looks in my direction, *naa*.

I’m able to grasp the reason as to why they went so far to call me here to watch this farce. They’re hoping I’ll have countermeasures to help them fight back.

Frankly, for a vending machine, even if a big store shows up, it won’t have much effect. I have the possibility of doing business 24 hours a day, and I can put out many products that Chain Restaurant can’t copy. I’m pretty sure the method for freeze-dried noodles for cup ramen aren’t possible for the otherworld inhabitants to do.

But you know, I like the residents here, and for Ramis’ sake too, it wouldn’t be any loss to be kind. This is also just in case there’s ever a time I break down and become

unusable, to secure a safe place for her.

Also, in my student days, there was a shop I liked that was run by an old couple, but the fact that a big store came and crushed them is a bitter memory; carrying out my revenge in another world doesn't sound too bad.

"And so, Hakkon-san, would you cooperate with us!? ...If you lend a hand, then, once the inn is restored, Rammis' lodgings will be half off."

If I had a flesh and blood body, I would have reacted to that second half that Munami muttered. *U-n*, even if there wasn't that negotiation I would have helped, but if Ramis can benefit, then my reasons for refusing have vanished.

"Welcome."

"Thank you! Hakkon-san."

"Oo-, if Hakkon cooperates with us, we'll have the strength of a hundred people ... no, a hundred boxes!"

"With this, we just might be able to make it somehow-!"

It's fine to be all excited, but, *are*, this is a huge responsibility, *ne*. They're kind of acting like they've already won, but what would they have done if I said I wasn't going to help them at all, these people.

I want to heave a huge sigh, but since I can only say predetermined words, I quietly withstood it.



"So this is Chain Restaurant. I heard the rumors, but it's really splendid-looking, *ne*."

"So, they finally got a branch even on this level."

Ramis and Hyurumi have come to investigate the enemy together. Right now they're in front of the shop but, as expected it's not to the degree of a shopping mall, but

looking at it from the point of this world, it rivals the Hunter Association in size.

The roof is dome-shaped, and looks to be one story. With most curved wood panels set in, it's a round-shaped shop. It's a very conspicuous design in this community.

The entrance's door is big; shop-workers wearing coats close to primary-color yellow are yelling in loud voices trying to draw in customers.

"Welcome, welcome. If you want food, we offer everything; delicious, cheap, and convenient, you'll want to get to know Chain Restaurant! We're Chain Restaurant! In commemoration of opening day, right now we're offering our products for, guess what, half-price, yes half-price!"

Somehow, it's a very nostalgic atmosphere. If it was Japan, you'd see this spectacle more than enough, but in the other world it's different; it's rare, so the flood of people entering the interior shop doesn't stop.

It's prospering quite well. It's well-known name and success also give it some influence. For new people who've arrived at the community, I understand their feelings of being able to order whatever they want here instead of going to a small store.

"Oh my oh my oh my. Well well well well, could this be spying on the enemy?"

The slender man who had been touting customers, while rubbing his hands together, stepped up. The smile that clings to his face looks like a really shady smile.

"Eh, how did he know we're spying?"

"Ramis ... your back, your back."

Hitting her hand on her forehead, Hyurumi shook her head tiredly.

Well, yeah, carrying me on her back, anyone would figure it out. Does she have no awareness of how it stands out?

"So this is Hakkon, the magic tool that has a will. Our president was also interested,

ne. How about it, would you work for us? You can expect good treatment.”

What an unexpected recruitment. It doesn't feel like he's joking, *na*, his eyes aren't laughing at all. It seems like they want to make me, who's their greatest existing hindrance, a companion, and draw me over to their side as soon as possible.

“Hakkon doesn't have any interest in working at a place like this. Because he's always going to be with me, *ne*. Right, Hakkon?”

“Welcome.”

“Saaaa?”

And exactly why is Ramis puffing out her chest and making a 'so there' face? But, *maa*, since I reincarnated in another world, a regular, stable workplace is something I honestly have no interest in. And besides, if I work here, then I wouldn't be any different from a vending machine in front of a supermarket.

“That is a shame. *Maa*, in several months, you will probably come to us yourself. Then, we're quite busy, so excuse me.”

I will come to them myself? Exactly what is he saying, this person.

I thought the two people would go home now that the tension has dropped, but acting like it wouldn't do if they didn't do something, they entered the shop carrying me.

With an entrance so big that it's no problem to enter with a vending machine, the interior is a spacious area without any other walls. The right side is for selling goods, huh. They're offering dried meat and other foods that will last a long time. It's mostly products aimed at Hunters.

In the center, there's a counter stretched out facing the left; on the inside, there's the kitchen. There, it's the kind where you give your order and receive your food.

There's also long tables lined up, with chairs set at even intervals. It looks like a food court like system.

Ramis got a pasta with meat and yellow-green colored vegetables in it. Hyurumi requested bread and a white fish meuniere-looking thing.

The impression from looking at both dishes is that it looks good, but it's all normal food you'd find in an eatery; there isn't anything particularly different that makes an impression.

"N-, it's pretty normal tasting, *ne*."

"Aa, it be like, at the level you can guess its taste."

The two girls, with no special impressions, disinterestedly eat. If you don't really have a palette for taste, it would be hard to compare flavors so it would appear delicious. However, the joy that comes when you eat it is absolutely not there. Though when they ate my products, the two of them were so delighted.

"It's good, but, what is it. It's normal, *ne*."

"It's 'cause we so used to Hakkon's food, this ain't got the surprise or the excitement, *na*. It just normal good."

I get it. Chain stores are things that don't go above a certain level of artistry for taste.

Because they have to avoid displeasing everyone they cater to, they don't aim for 100 points, they aim for taste that's at least 70 points. It's not like that's bad. No matter what store, they have to aim for uniform taste, and they can't do any flavoring that's complex and takes too much time and effort. And since they sell at a low price, they're limited on what ingredients they can use too.

And as a bonus, flavorings are expensive, so in this world the basics are salty or not-so-salty.

Right there is a weakness we might be able to break through in.

It also feels like their very typical menu limits them. *Fumu fumu*, I believe I've caught the tail of the solution.

-
1. I have decided to translate this level in the dungeon as either Seiryu Lake or Clear-Stream Lake (seiryu meaning clear stream). Should I translate this proper noun or leave it in Japanese? I have equal like and dislike for either.
 2. While I could have translated the restaurant name (Kusari Shokudo) to Chain Eatery or Chain Cafeteria or something, I have a fondness for Japanese-style puns, and I am sticking to Chain Restaurant, because it's SO RARE for Japanese-style puns to be easily translated 1 for 1. I am totally sticking behind this awesomeful decision.

CHAPTER 29

OVERTHROW, CHAIN RESTAURANT!

“Now then, the second great Overthrow, Chain Restaurant’s Annihilation meeting will begin!”

“Uoooooooo-!”

To keep up with the overly-worked up men, the embarrassed way the female shopkeepers, who weren’t riding that wave of enthusiasm, raised their fists in the air was pretty moe.

Today, like the previous time, they have the same representative . So it looks like Munami was decided to be the advance leader.

The location is inside the tent that is the inn’s Okami-san’s temporary place of business. The tables and chairs are pretty much all up against the wall, so we have quite a bit of available space.

“This time, it’s about developing new menu items to oppose them. Everyone was told last time, so you’ve all brought samples, *ne*. Then, first, let’s try them.”

So saying, she placed the sample food on top of the round table; the shopkeepers went around tasting the flavors and exchanging opinions. Every one of them presented their food, but honestly, none of them really jumped out.

It’s at the degree where they just arranged existing dishes a little, so although I’m unable to taste it, just seeing the other peoples’ reaction tells me they aren’t fragrant.

“Well then, here we turn to the one who is participating this time as well, Hakkon-san. Do you have any advice? For example, what do you think about my new dish?”

The dish that was pushed in front of my eyes is something like pasta in a thick soup. It kind of looks like cream pasta, but the color isn’t white, it’s yellow.

“Uuum, Hakkon seems a little troubled, so if me and Hyurumi eat it and give you our impressions, would that work somehow?”

“Welcome.”

Aa, oh yeah. This time we have the special guests Ramis and Hyurumi participating. It's because they also wanted to get opinions from customers. If they can take my place and act as my tasters, that would help a lot.

“Hakkon said it was alright, so is it fine to eat it, Munami?”

“Yep yep, please do. Hyurumi too, go ahead, *ne*.”

“I ain't got much confidence in my sense of taste, though, *na*.”

The two people lifted the yellow soup pasta to their mouths. They chewed silently, the two wiped their mouths.

“*Un*, I think it's good. Just, the flavor's a bit thin? I thought the stock was meat-based, but the thickness seems to be from vegetables. If it was a bit stickier so it could stick to the pasta better it'd be better, I think.”

“Yeah, it really is that kinda feeling. Wish the pasta was a bit stiffer, it wasn't boiled good. If ya make it so it would be ok if it soaked up the soup some, I think it would be easier to eat.”

Well aren't the two of their opinions precise together? Ramis has pride in her home-cooking, and it looks like it's not a lie that Hyurumi has a sense of taste comparable to the best chef. I wonder if it's because she's been eating this kind of stuff since she was born, and it all compounded within her to give her that tongue.

“Ha, hang on a sec. Let me take notes. Uum, Hakkon, what about you?”

The excited Munami came back to me. My opinion ... so what other improvements other than the two girls' that I can think of, huh? A- , if it's a cream-type, heavy pasta, how about this, white cream pasta.

I also have canned soup pasta, but since the noodles have the pre-requisite to be able to sit in the soup for a long time, they use something that's different from regular pasta, so it can only make for a weak reference at best.

And so, the pasta I put out is a pasta they sell specifically on vending machines on ferries. It's got the soup and the pasta separate, so you have to cut open the sealed pouch and mix it in yourself, but I remember the flavor being pretty good.

"Fuwa-, this is, pasta and a bag? Uum, it's hot, but I'm going to have to open the seal. Looks like there's a picture of scissors drawn on here, so cut it off here and pour the contents over ...could this be white mushrooms and smoked meat? The taste is ... *nngu-*, delicious! It has a distinct, deep flavor and a thickness to the consistency. This is milk from an animal, *ne. Un, un*, if that's how it is ..."

It seems like, because of the reference, she headed towards the kitchen with the notes in hand.

Seeing her go off like that, the shopkeepers all surrounded us at once, and it became a situation where the two girls were given prototype after prototype to sample.

For the shopkeeper whose pride was hot soups, I put out tonjiru (pork miso soup with veggies), shijimijiru (stewed clam soup), and miso soup. It doesn't look like miso exists, but it looks like it stimulated the shopkeeper's inspiration, and he nodded many times.

It looks like the two female twins offer sweets, so I put out the crepes in a clear bottle that I ate at Kagoshima. These vending machine crepes are quite locally famous, so there's quite the abundance of types and they are quite good.

Since crepes are quite popular among women, it will probably be received well by the girls who work at the very erotic Shirley-san's shop. If they set up a street stall near there, they'll be able to make quite a bit, it seems.

Like that, with me presenting food that matched each shop's specialty, and them taking notes while listening to the two girls' advice, with this and that the development

of the new menu items began from there. Alright, now, from here on, it's business.

"Are, Hakkon changed shape again, but this is ... eggs?"

That's right, this time I changed to an egg vending machine. Actually, egg vending machines are surprisingly popular, so you can see quite a few of them in various places.

Since it looks like securing ingredients isn't going well, the eggs sold like they were leaping out from me. Furthermore, when I switched to a vending machine that sold a lot of vegetables you could find in the area, once again the shopkeepers scrambled to buy them.

With the soup pasta and crepe requiring it, of course I also sold milk. It's just, since I hadn't come across a vending machine that sold raw meat, there was nothing I could do about that. Probably, the food and health committee had some problems with that, to it's not something you can do in Japan. Let's have the Hunters do their best for meat.

I kept the prices reasonable. The ingredients sales were very popular with the food and drink shopkeepers, so it was decided to secure a time just once a week to sell ingredients. They begged for at least during the period of winter, and so we came to an agreement.

It's been three days since then, and today is the day that the food and drink shopkeepers decided to all come out in revolt.

Starting from today, the food and drink shops will be limiting themselves to making food during sales hours in order to boost their activities. They also chose beverages that would match their new menus.

The fight is up through Chain Restaurant's one month opening sale. During this period, while it prevents an over-flooding of customers, is the time to grasp their stomachs tightly.

If Chain Restaurant comes to the decision that they cannot make a profit, they're famous for immediately withdrawing; if the sales during their opening sale is bad, then the possibility that they'll withdraw their branch from Seiryu's lake shore is very

high.

I've done all I can, so now it's just waiting for the result. I've been placed in a spot where I can see each store well, so today I'll take my time observing all day.

In the morning each store was busy preparing, and it was right before lunchtime when all the activity began at once.

"From today we have a new menu! Zyugiuma fried to a crisp, a delicacy popular with young folks! Come on, try it out!"

"Meat with its flavor sealed inside is a supreme dish. The flavor here is something you can't taste anywhere else *yo*-"

"After eating something strongly flavored, how about gentle sweetness from a cute sweet-? The fruit for its filling is free for you to choose-"

Raising loud voices, each and every one of the street stall shopkeepers began calling out.

Chain Restaurant's branch had been here for over two weeks; it's the time around when the customers have tried just about every flavor of the food before their eyes, so the stalls chose products that haven't been seen or heard of before.

And, pretty much all of the food the stalls chose are what some people would customarily call junk food. It's stuff whose nutritional balance is poor and calories are high, but if you're comparing this world's people to modern Japan's, the calorie consumption is on another level.

In the first place, this is a world where you can't thoughtlessly ingesting vegetables when you're in the midst of winter is the norm; worrying about that in itself is wrong. In this season, if you put in vegetables and hike up the price, saying, "We thought of the nutritional value and put in vegetables. That's why the price went up," your customers won't come.

The stall that's selling hamburgers just has lettuce alone sandwiched in, but it's at the degree that it's getting praised for being a luxury despite being cheap.

For a street stall, once you put out your food, you shouldn't overlap with others, but in this place, kara'age (nuggets of fried chicken) is selling the best. Next would be hamburgers, and then something like takoyaki(octopus chunks covered in batter and rolled into balls, then grilled in a special pan). There's no octopus, so they put in some meat. I provided the takoyaki sauce. It's something that's normally sold in vending machines, so I bought it many times when I was still alive.

Right in front of the Hunter Association is the stretch of street stalls; with the Hunters who just finished a request and warmed their purses buying it right there on the spot, this location has become quite the plus. Chain Restaurant needs a large plot of land, so they built their store in a place a little bit further away. It's the cold winter season, so the people who feel that moving over there is troublesome are many.

And then, the steam rising from the stalls brings a smell that tickles the appetite. Being able to withstand this temptation is probably rare. The flavors have been checked by Ramis and Hyurumi, and were completed with pride, so the shopkeepers are brimming with confidence.

"This, what is that?"

A single Hunter standing and eating at a food stall tilted his head as the shopkeeper passed him a business-card-sized card.

"This is, when you buy an item, a stamp is put on it. When it's all filled out, you'll be given a discount of 1 silver coin."

"Hee-, interesting. Eh, is it okay if it's not just this store?"

"Yes, for any store with the picture of this card in front of it, it's fine."

This as well is the secret plan part two. We're introducing point cards. The participating stores are, of course, the food and beverage shops managed by the shopkeepers that participated in that meeting.

How did these guys think of this point card? The trigger was definitely me. A vending

machine where you insert a card and save points, nowadays it's not so rare.

And, from the manufacturer, there are also products that take point cards; when I took this Function, actually I had to drop the cards for them to be understood.

Maa, the shopkeepers didn't understand the reason at all, but Hyurumi understood how to use it, so she taught them. Hyurumi's powers of understanding really helped.

With my offhand knowledge and the two girls' advice, Seiyru Lake level's food and drink businesses were revived as a result, and they've become quite superior. It's at the degree where the things they've never seen before stops the customers and draws them in, but that's fine. As long as we can remain superior for a short time, Chain Restaurant will retreat.

Lunch was our overwhelming superiority; the frustrated glares from the people from Chain Restaurant who came to investigate made quite the impression.

The cold in the evening was quite harsh, so the street stalls quickly closed up shop early, but since the shops that were using point cards were advertised for at noon, people kept flooding into the temporary inn tent and other stores that use point cards.

Different from lunchtime, it's soup and stir-fried items with vegetables, but since it's provided at low costs, it's popular among the people who ate heavy things during the day and elderly women.

Of course, the reason they were able to make it low-priced is because I set my prices at the bare minimum. Even so, I didn't occur any point loss. When Chain Restaurant withdraws, the food and beverage stores will become my rivals so it might be like sending salt to the enemy¹, but that's fine too.

Ramis still seems to have great hopes to succeed as a Hunter. Right now the community's reconstruction takes precedence, but once the winter's over, I think she will be starting Hunter activities again. Then, if the community's food situation stabilizes, even as people gather, the community's prosperity won't decline.

And, Ramis is very reserved when it comes to me. I want the community to be in a

situation where it doesn't need me, so we can break through the situation where she finds it difficult to move around from the community.

Well, *maa*, it looks like I'm thinking about a lot of things, but my real intentions are ... after all this time, I've been transported to another world so I'd like to look around; I want to really experience being in another world

Uotto, costumers came. First things first, I have to do the working of a vending machine.

"Welco me."

"Yo-, Hakkon. I have something pretty interesting. Let's bond as guys ... you're a guy, right? *Maa*, right now, that doesn't really matter. I have something I want to consult with you about."

Seeing Leader Keryoil's always frivolous expression, the foreboding I have triggers the warning bells in my mind and they won't stop ringing.

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1. sending salt to the enemy – playing fair and square without taking advantage of your enemy's weakness. So Hakkon's basically saying, I didn't take advantage of people who will eventually become my rivals once the Chain Restaurant leaves even though this would have been a good chance to.
 2. I'm a little braindead, didn't want to try to figure out how to switch it around to make sense in text while still sounding like an idiom.

CHAPTER 30

EXPEDITION AND BARGAINING

“It’s fine if it’s after winter passes, but do you guys have any interest in joining us on an expedition?”

At Leader Keryoil’s sudden request, I take a single breath and,

“Too bad.”

Is how I responded. That request was basically what I expected, so there was no need to be confused.

If I go, that means Ramis will get dragged along too as part of a set. Making the decision all on my own isn’t a good circumstance. I’ll leave her decision to herself.

“Like always, you give an immediate answer, Hakkon. *Naa*, could it be, you don’t like me?”

“Welcome.”

“You ... if you treat your frequent customers well, they’ll keep coming, *daze*. And also, I didn’t really want to say it, but when they were going to go ahead and rescue you, we volunteered, though, *na-*. And it’s not like we’re saying you should return the favor, though, but when we rescued Hakkon, some of my brigade members became casualties, though, *na-*. Oh no, it’s not like we’re expecting you to do this because of that; that’s totally not it at all, though -.”

Certainly, as the Leader says, I do owe the Fools of Whimsy Brigade. I’ll acknowledge that over and over, but I’m no good with Leader Keryoil’s shady demeanor. It’s purely speculation, but he feels like someone who can betray others with a smile, this person.

But you know, what this opponent has said is completely true. Thanks to the Fools of Whimsy Brigade lending their strength, they were able to easily destroy the thief band.

“Welcome.”

“O, you’re beginning to open your heart up a little. *Maa*, this is something we should discuss with Ramis too, *na*. We’ve got time until the snow melts. Think about it at your leisure.”

So saying, Leader Keryoil stood. There’s no meaning for me to mull it over here and there in my head. Whatever Ramis wants to do, that’s what we’ll do.

-tte, right now is the brawl with Chain Restaurant. That night has advanced, and it looks like each store is closing for the night. If you compare it to several days prior, no matter which store, I think all of them had three times the customers entering, even guessing on the light side. It’s probably fine to say it’s a great success. If we can keep this up for two weeks, there’s hope.

Let’s just forget about the Leader’s talk for now; I need to concentrate.

From there, fame called upon fame, and every single day the customers increased; even after two weeks had passed, most of the customers came back.

These several days, the days where snow fell from dusk through the evening were many; since it’s closer than the residential areas, the Hunters and people who were trying to keep warm around the food and drink stalls increased, just about.

Once Chain Restaurant had been open for a month, they quickly and easily withdrew from Seiryu Lake Level’s community. This resolute way of knowing when to quit is very much like a large chain store, but it’s fitting. Honestly, it feels like we dodged a bullet.¹

Though, since the shopkeepers are pleased, it’s not like I’m displeased. With such a splendid retreat, I doubt that there’s a hidden agenda to it. Whatever the case, we are now facing spring; once we enter the season of the Hunters’ activities, the uneasiness will probably disappear.

Oh, that’s right, once it becomes spring, although I said I didn’t want to accompany the

Fools of Whimsy Brigade on their expedition in response to the invitation, the result of discussing it with Ramis is that we'll take it.

Their expedition is a round-trip that will take two weeks regardless of how it turns out; the object is to scout out a certain monster, as well as subjugation if they are able to.

When we met up to talk about deciding whether to join up, it was Ramis, me, and Hyurumi as well. Since the subject is something you don't want to let people hear, I intruded into the tent that the two childhood friends are borrowing.

"Speaking of the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, they super famous. And they be asking you to join them; it's a happy thing, but ... 's it really ok?"

"*U-n*, Leader-san said if I'm afraid to fight, then it's ok if I just carry Hakkon, but I want to fight. It's not like I like fighting, but if I keep passing every time, I'll never get stronger, so."

Clenching her fist tightly, Ramis' side-profile became very serious compared to her usual face, so it was a little bit scary.

I'm close to her, so even if she keeps her strong ambitions to herself, I understand just by looking. As for why she wants to get stronger, I understand the origin is the story Hyurumi told me about what happened to their hometown, but doing it just because of that ...

"Ramis. You, you're really -- you want to get revenge?"

"*Un*. If I don't kill that guy who attacked our village that day, I'll never be able to forgive myself-!"

For a dangerous word like 'kill' to come flying from Ramis' mouth, the parts inside me raised up a strange noise. At the time when I was abducted her anger was also exposed, but seeing her eyes filled with murderous intent, it's like my heat insulation effect was broken.

Since the story was that monsters destroyed the village, "that guy" must be the

monsters' chief, I guess.

"So that means Ramis saw him, that dude controlling the monsters."

"That guy was, that man was, while controlling the monsters, he was smiling! When he killed Ma and Pa, like he was having fun, he was laughing-!"

Slamming her fist down, she drilled a hole into the ground; it was buried up to the wrist.

So the reason she continued to do the Hunter business she wasn't suited for has come to the surface at last. It's not like revenge will bring the dead people back, and there are probably people who'd say it's a futile deed.

I'm not in a position to be able to say such pretty words, since I've never gone through such an experience. If I were to say something naive, I'd like her to throw away those savage thoughts and just continue to do the work of a Hunter.

But you know, the only person who understands her feelings is the person herself. I can sympathize with her, but fully comprehending it is something I can't do. Then, until her intent runs out, I want to support her. For that reason, I, as a vending machine, have no intentions of slacking off on my assistance.

"Then, whatever I got to say is useless. If it's the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, I ain't interacted with them myself, so I got no choice but to trust them. And now, you got a trusty pal with ya."

With her mouth taking the shape of a smile, in response to Hyurumi's flirtatious glance, I responded "Welcome" with all my heart. Although it's a recording, so I have my doubts to whether the feeling was transmitted.

"Thanks for worrying, Hyurumi. Hakkon too, thank you, *na*."

Ashamed of losing her cool, she shyly scratched her head. I can keep up a <Barrier> limited to her stature to protect her, but I probably won't be able to do anything else to help in a fight.

Since I absorbed a good portion of the coins stashed away by the thief gang, my points have become something amazing, but it's not to the degree I can learn another Divine Blessing. If, just it, I had just enough points, even then I'd like to have some more for buffer, since you never know what could happen. That's what's been ingrained into my body from the previous abduction incident.

If I was going to get an ability, it'd probably be enough for one Function. There's a lot of candidates, but the point consumption isn't normal, so I haven't been able to come to a decision. After pouring in several tens of thousands of points, if it doesn't match up to my expectations, I'd be so down that I wouldn't be able to come back for quite a while.

"Whoo, whoo, let's stop thinking about it. And it's not spring yet, so we got lotsa time. Or like, it's late so let's sleep. You got rubble removal work waiting for you tomorrow, starting from the morning, right?"

"*Un.* Ok, then let's sleep! A, Hakkon, it's ok if you sleep in the tent here today, right?"

"To sleep with us two beauties is the best, right?"

It certainly is the best, but I don't have a flesh and blood body. There's no chance of making 'mistakes'.

Looking the tent over again, even though I take up a lot of space, I'm not a hindrance, the tent is that spacious. In the center portion of the round tent is a single support stuck in the ceiling portion; it's quite steadfast and proper for people to live in.

Inside are wardrobes and beds, two each. A large, wooden table with a sturdy-looking tabletop. And then there are small tools and magic tool-looking parts scattered around. Those are without a doubt Hyurumi's.

For two girls living together, it's a stark room, but on top of the table a carnation was left, just barely turning it a little girl-ish. I'm really glad I gave it to her.

"A, since Hakkon gave it to me, I'm taking good care of the flower, *ne.*"

“*Hee*, so you gave only Ramis something. *A-*, even though it was my birthday three days ago *na-*. That’s right, this year I didn’t get nothing, *naa-*”

“*Aa-!* Sorry, I completely forgot. Tomorrow, let’s go eat something really good, okay?”

“Thankya, Ramis. So then, ain’t Hakkon gonna do something?”

She’s probably half-joking, but her knowledge has helped me out a lot, and from here on I’d like her to continue lending me her strength. A product that would suit her; actually, I’ve already decided what it would be.

It’s just, in order to avoid other people catching on getting it to get up to no good, I’ve been waiting for the chance to give it to her so surrounding people won’t notice. And so, this situation is just perfect.

“Juuuuuust kidding. It’s a joke, so don’t take it ... oooooooo-! Th, this is-!”

Hyurumi grabbed the me who changed into a red and white, long and narrow body almost as if she was hugging me. The pupils of her eyes were blazing, and from her mouth was repeated, raspy breaths.

Your eyes are terrifying, your eyes are terrifying! I thought she was going to bite me, that’s how her reaction looks.

“On the other side of the glass there’s a lot of tools, *ne*. *A*, it’s all stuff Hyurumi just loves.”

Right, this time I’m a small tools vending machine. The items are; safety glasses, mask, tape measure, gloves, an 8-setting screw driver, and a water-repellant nylon jacket.

It’s a vending machine that specializes in small tools, so the quality is also good, and for the gloves, they have antibacterial and anti-odor treatment, are processed to allow air-ventilation, and have anti-slip added. When Hyurumi saw them, it was like she was going to grow an extra arm to grab them, that’s how badly she wanted such a prize.

“H, how much is the price?! Ramis, if I don’t got enough, lend some to me!”

“E, a, un.”

Her eyes drawing close to being bloodshot, Hyurumi’s intensity was overpowering. I understand that these types of items would sell with the craftsmen, but I’m troubled over where to draw the line when it comes to producing an outbreak of technology. That’s why, as a general rule, I only deal with things that will be consumed with nothing left.

I believe Hyurumi won’t misuse them, so that’s why I’m not reluctant to offer them to her.

She’s counting all the money she has on hand, but this time it’s supposed to be a birthday present, so I have no intentions on taking a fee.

I dropped all the products together, and she lifted everything to the sky, leaking out a “Ooooooooooo!” A, Ramis backed up a little.²

“Hakkon, is this seriously ok, to give them to me-!”

“Welcome.”

“Thanks, I love you-!”

Hyurumi, overwhelmed with emotions, kissed my glass, then retreated and lined up the small tools on the desk to try them out ... -tte, that surprised me-. To think she even kissed me. At times like these, not having a sense of feeling is tough, *na. M,maa*, it’s not a bad atmosphere, though.

“Hakkon, you look happy...”

Exactly what are you trying to say, Ramis-san? And exactly why are you glaring at me with narrowed eyes, I wonder?

“Muu-.”

Even when she’s puffing out her cheeks and pouting, her face is still quite cute, or like, this isn’t the time for that.

After that, in order to bring back Ramis' good humor, I gave her this and that of products that she'd like, but she was still pouty for an entire day.

1. of course it doesn't actually say bullet. The literal is "Feels like we dodge what we would have taken on"
2. A subtle way of saying, Ramis was getting a li-ttle creeped out by Hyurumi's actions. "took some distance" is often used in this way in Japanese.

CHAPTER 31

CANNED ODEN

The winter at Seiryu's lakeside is quite harsh; it's not quite to the degree of Japan's snowy areas, but there's regularly about 5 cms of snow piling up. Any more than this and it's possible the accumulated snow will crush the tents, so it's seldom that more than 1 meter of snow accumulates ... I hope.

It appears that the monsters on this level hibernate deep underground for the winter and the commissions for the Hunters to subjugate them or collect materials from them are rare, so it's standard to just hole-up in the community, is what the gatekeeper Karios revealed while eating oden.

It's just, this year there's the reconstruction work, so there's no lack of work to go around the community; the Hunters who would normally migrate to other levels when winter comes have stayed here. That's what the young shopkeeper, milk tea in one hand, told me happily.

As usual, I'm carried by Ramis to a particular spot during construction work, and in the evening I'm selling goods in front of the Hunter Association.

Before the time the food stalls close shop I only put up beverages, and after that I line up food; that's the pattern I use. I understand that the air outside is cold, but I don't have the function to feel temperature, so I don't suffer at all.

A-, I'm also fine not adding a function to sense atmospheric temperature. Within the types called the next-generation in vending machines, there's also those that measure atmospheric temperature and will suggest products based on that.

"U-, it's so cold, it's so cold. Soup and stew, stew."

There are few people who would come buy products out of curiosity in this violently blowing cold wind in the night. From this voice I've become accustomed to and seeing the current situation, there's no doubt that's the gatekeeper, Karios.

“Gols, what are you gonna get today?”

“Sweet tea.”

“You always get that.”

“You always get the stewed skewers too.”

So today it's Karios and Gols who are in charge of the gates. Thank you for your hard work in this cold weather.

After the two of them bought hot products, they stuck them in their breast pockets and the pockets in their clothes for a while, and as a result of using them in place of hand warmers, they established the heat of the products a little.

“It's warm and toasty today too, *na*. Thanks, Hakkon.”

“I give you my thanks.”

“Thank you very much.”

Knowing that I'm concerned about the temperature regulation, they always do this, so I give them my thanks.

Ever since I came to this community, right after Ramis, the people I exchange words with the most are probably these two. *Maa*, in general it's Karios that talks; me and Gols only make responsive interjections.

The backs of the two, rounded out with thick coats and collars stood up, disappeared into the darkness. Looking at them, I wanted to be situated closer to the gate, but I refuse to leave Ramis so I want to be able to see the girls' tents; I pass the night til morning at this fixed spot, and seldom move from it.

Every time I see those two off, I see something red enter the corner of my field of vision.

Aa, again, huh?

It's a single woman wearing a blood-red one-piece dress. So saying, it's not a short-sleeve dress, but a loose-fitting, long-sleeved, long-length dress; I think she's probably wearing thick clothes underneath.

Around her neck is wrapped a scarf that's also completely red; her shoes and gloves too are both the same red tint. But as for that woman's face, I can't say much.

With long, black hair that stretches down her back, her bangs reach the tip of her nose. Her mouth, which is the only thing you can see, is also lacquered with bright red rouge.

Standing still in the middle of the night with clothes all one red color is an eerie woman. It wouldn't be weird if this was a setting where you would normally let out a scream and run away, but I can't move, and I don't have a function to scream, either. And anyway – – I've gotten used to it.

This woman, she appears quite a lot, especially at night.

It's already rare that I get customers at night, but with this outfit. Even if I don't want to, I remember her. I think it's dangerous for a woman to go walking around at night, but if you ask me whether or not there's a person with enough courage to call out to this woman, I'd be a bit troubled for the answer.

Like always, she buys a can of oden, and then *su-* disappears into the darkness.

There's a guy who's been reincarnated as a vending machine here, so it wouldn't be that weird if there were ghosts. However, that woman has substance, so she's definitely living. Furthermore, the moment she takes the canned oden, her mouth floats into a smile. She might be a big oden maniac.

No matter what kind of person it is, the fact that she's a customer doesn't change. Furthermore, standing – – no, set-up¹ like that in a place until no one's around seems very sad and lonesome, so that calms me down.

Anyway, today seems cold as well, *na*.



“Fuu-, dammit, even in this blasted cold, we’re on guard all night ...”

“Give it up.”

Today too, the bald-headed Karios and crew-cut Gols are on guard all night. Although it’s just among the community’s guardsmen, they have quite the reputation, so on the nights that rare, dangerous monsters keep showing up, they’re often put on rotation.

“So cooold. If I had another scarf to wrap up in, I’d feel better, ze.”

“As always, it’s an unpleasant color.”

“Hahn-, I don’t care about your opinion. My lucky color is red, see. A long time ago, a fortune-teller who often got things right told me that.”

Honestly, I don’t really know what to think about a grim-faced ossan wearing a bright-red scarf, but to each his own. It’s the best for the concerned party if he wears things that he likes.

“Speaking of red, there’s this rumor.”

“Aa, the one about the woman in red, huh? Recently I’ve heard there’s been a lot of people saying they’ve seen her late at night. If it’s a harmful ghost, then they gotta exorcise it.”

In this world, there are ghosts, the objects of fear, but they’re existences that might need to be exterminated, huh? As expected of another world. These two people aren’t showing frightened behavior at all.

That rumored ghost is, without a doubt, that woman. I also mistook her for a ghost at first, so I fully understand why there’s that kind of rumor.

The two men took up their usual canned oden and milk tea in their hands, and quickly marched off in the direction of the gate. Right before the two’s figures disappeared,

the usual red-clothed woman cut into my field of vision.

It might be a little late, but I just realized the conditions for that woman's appearance. She always comes right after those two show up. And then, clasping the canned oden like that, she chases after those two in the direction of the gate and disappears.

As you would expect, with all this information laid before me, even I will suspect it. This red-clothed girl probably likes Karios. She buys his favorite canned oden, and she coordinates her entire outfit to the red color he said he likes.

That stalker-like mindset is scary, but she's just watching over him from afar so she doesn't mean any harm by it ... probably.

As she motionlessly observes them, a strong, cold wind blows, and it disturbed her bangs. I gasped at the face that came into view under it.

Clear eyes and a well-shaped nose. Her expression with her cheeks dyed red is quite alluring to see. It was to the degree that I unconsciously used the vending machine security camera to record it.

"Karios-sama..."

Her voice, that I heard for the first time, is frail; the night wind drowned it out, but you can feel the heat of her feelings in it.

I'm certain that Karios doesn't have a lover or wife, *na*. If she goes for him pretty seriously I think he'd fall for her, but it doesn't look like this woman has the courage for that. And then there's the matter of his own tastes, so there's nothing I can do but warmly watch over her.

Clutching the canned oden, tottering after Karios, once again she walks off in the direction of the gate.



“Alri-ght, today’s my day off-! What should I do~.”

Raising his voice, Karios stepped up, almost skipping with merriment, and appeared in front of me. It’s the first time I’ve seen Karios in every-day wear, but, *maa*, it’s pretty normal, *na*. It’s just, the red scarf is too much; it would be best if he had an old masked hero’s mask to go with it, it looks like.

“How about going to that tools store and getting some fixtures?”

It looks like Gols is going to guard after this, so he buys milk tea in his usual outfit.

“O-, th,that’s true. Just like you said, I’ll go to the tools store!”

Are, he’s kind of *sowasowa* acting nervous. Staring at his reflection in the glass, he’s checking that his clothes aren’t out of order.

Seeing this, Gols let out a small “Fu-“ laugh.

“O, okaaay, then what should I bring as a small gift ... a-“

“A,ara, Karios-san.”

Seeing the woman coincidentally passing by, Karios’ back **pin-to** went ram-rod straight. As for the woman, with both her hands carrying bundles, she became petrified.

“Wh,what a coincidence. I was just about to go to the tools store, you know.”

“I, is that so. I’m also just about to return there. A-, that scarf is always a beautiful red, *ne*.”

“Really? I actually like red.”

Karios’ tone is uncomfortably polite. Despite the cold weather, the temple of his forehead is covered in sweat. It seems like he’s quite nervous.

The woman as well, her line of sight is all over the place, and her behavior is a little suspicious, *na. Are*, aren't these two giving off kind of a good vibe – – A, that woman's face ... I've seen it somewhere. Her bangs are pushed back with a curved headband so it's in plain view, but it's that red-clothed woman. I have to bring up the picture from the security camera to match it, but there's no doubt.

Are-, could it be mutual love? What's this, I had thought I'd give them my blessing, but for some reason, I'm kind of irritated.

"Karios, if you're going to the tools store, then how about you take some of her stuff?"

Oo, nice follow-up, Gols.

"Th,that's true. If you're alright with it, would you let me carry your baggage?"

"Th, thank you very much."

Receiving the stuff, the two of the walk away shoulder to shoulder. Watching their backs, Gols heaved a large sigh.

"Good grief, they should hurry up and get together already."

"Welcome."

I think so too. I voice my agreement to Gols.



Late at night, as the same two guys take their leave from in front of the vending machine, once again the red-colored woman – – the tools store's shop attendant made her appearance. As always she clutched the canned oden, watching Karios' back.

"Karios-sama. How should I convey these feelings?"

She is definitely a maiden in love.

According to Gols, previously in the community, there were some Hunters with nasty behavior that tried to drag her off somewhere in the dark, and it seems like Karios saved her.

With that as a trigger, somehow or other, before he knew it, he had seriously fallen for her. With his over-excited personality as a bad habit, and the woman seeming to be a late bloomer, he was unable to take the first step and it dragged on and on until it reached the situation they're in now.

The tools store girl too, she seems to have become aware of Karios ever since the previous incident; Gols, watching from close by, wants to think of something to fix this irritating relationship.

U-n, a chance, huh. Calling out to the man would be the best, but in front of that stern face, that girl will be too nervous so she won't be able to speak well.

That said, if she had an excuse to approach him then ... *naa*, there's that, isn't there?

"Haa, today as well, I'm wrapped up in your favorite red, but I can only look after your figure from behind ... *e-*"

Ignoring the girl who began to talk to herself, I changed my body. It's the vending machine I was when I offered vegetables to the food and beverage stall owners.

"These are vegetables?"

Tilting her head in front of the daikon I'm offering, the girl opened the glass lid to the locker.

"A, e, is it ok to take this?"

"Welcome."

Confirming the girl timidly took the daikon, now I change into egg-selling mode. And then, like before, I offer one pack of eggs.

Next, this time I drop down chikuwa (fish-paste cake). It might be a little late to say

this, but the wealth of vending machine products is surprising. This is something that I found in a certain parking-lot.

And then, lastly, I returned to the usual vending machine mode, it's a bit out there, but it's a product I like. It's flying fish soup stock in a plastic bottle.

This was something I discovered in vending machines in Osaka, but the flying fish made it a bit expensive – – in other words, there's a single, whole flying fish stuck in there.

"U,um, er, to have received so many things, um, what should I do with them?"

For my last act, I drop down a canned oden. Seeing that, the woman's eyes went wide and she stared at me. Looks like she realized it.

"You mean, these ingredients, they're to make this stew, *ne-*."

"Welcome."

"Th,thank you so much! With this, I can make that person notice me!"

Understanding everything, the girl bowed her head towards me many times, then rushed away in a directions different than the usual gate's direction. Seeing her earnestness, I hope it will go well, but thinking that Karios' spring has finally come, I think it can't be helped that I'm irritated.



"Gols, Hakkon, love is so wonderful! It's like every day is sparkling! A, that's right, it was yesterday. She made me her home-cooking again, and it was so good."

A few days later, the girl made oden and invited Karios for a meal; with that as a chance, the two soon became lovers. And from then on, every day, me and Gols were subjected to listening to his fond love-talks about her.

Gols, with a face of absolute boredom from the bottom of his heart, is shooting cold

stares at him, but Karios completely doesn't realize it. Over and over and over; the fact that he doesn't get tired of talking about her is the only thing I can praise him for. Once it's past a little bit, it becomes an annoyance.

I am beginning to regret mediating their relationship a little.

"And so that's how it is. A, it's almost time to change watch guards. Then, I'll buy my usual. It's not as good as her home-cooking, but this is delicious in it's own right!"

With a merry tone, like always, Karios bought the canned oden and I dropped it for him.

"Hi-a-! Cooold! Wh,what the, Hakkon, it's not hot, zo!"

Keh-. It's chilled oden, eat up.

-
1. The raws use counter words; "one (person) – no, one (inanimate object like a table)". I have done my best.

CHAPTER 32

SPRING IS COMING

“Karios-san, your collar is crooked.”

“O,ou, thanks. I think I’m going to be coming home late, so even though it’ll be a bit lonely, don’t cry.”

“Ok. I’ll be waiting for you with the stew you like with a lot of eggs in it. Really, REALLY try not to get hurt.”

“It hurts so bad to leave you behind, that it feels like my body’s being torn in two ... but this is work. Sorry.”

“Yes, I don’t want to be apart from you either. But I also don’t want to be a hindrance in your work. I’ll swallow my tears – -“

They just don’t cut it out. Day in and day out, everyday this foolish looking couple mess around in front of the vending machine.

Isn’t his partner, Gols, putting his hand to his forehead like it hurts? Since the two of them guard the gate often, I bet he has to listen to the meandering love stories. Poor guy.

“Munami-san, today’s beautiful too, isn’t it? Recently the sun’s rays have gotten warm, it’s the perfect weather for a walk.”

“Isn’t it? Is your shop going to be okay today?”

And another troublesome group has come. The shopkeeper young man and Munami, who calls herself the inn’s poster girl. This group hasn’t quite gotten to the dating stage, but since Munami isn’t talking to him like she does to guests, more like talking to a friend, compared to before, they’ve gotten considerably closer.

And, for some reason, the full set starts chatting in front of me. Haa, just when I was thinking that the temperature's been rising so spring's about to come, I've become a gathering place for people with their "spring" in full-bloom.¹

Ah, it's spring, *ne*. But it's not like things will settle down with that. Pretty soon it's going to be the season where Hunters get lively. That's right, there's the promise Ramis made to participate in the Fools of Whimsy Brigade's expedition --

"Hakkon, are you in good shape?"

"Ou, lookin' like it's selling well today too. It be warm today, so let's go with that cold, bubbly stuff."

Well speak of the devil. Ramis and Hyurumi have come.

The couples, like always, have disappeared somewhere before I know it. It's fine if they're getting along, but seriously, I wish they'd go somewhere else. I don't have a flesh and blood body, so I have nothing to do with love affairs.

It's not like I'm jjealous or something. This time, in honor of their relationships, I'll give them a present of hot soda.

"Hakkon, we're leaving tomorrow, so are you going to be ok?"

"Welcome."

I've known about it way ahead of time, so I don't really have an excuse to decline.

It's not like I'm not worried, but this girl yearns to get stronger. She and I have a one-body-one-mind kind of relationship. We can only help each other by compensating for the other's weak points.

Ah, well, I said it so nicely, but I'm the one who has the most deficiencies. Since I don't have hands or feet, *nee*. I'm always being taken care of by her.

"That so, it be tomorrow, huh? The thing you was talking about, going with the Fools of Whimsy Brigade."

“Yeah, Hyurumi. Uum, I think, it’s surveying the situation with the gakujinma (alligator-men monsters).

“Gakujinma. So one branch of the Seiryu Lake level’s big three, huh?”

As Hyurumi said, the monsters that inhabit this level are largely split into three groups. The frog-men are the kaerujinma. The one who attacked the community, the jyasouma. And the ones who walk on two legs, not the lizard-kin, but the alligator-men, gakujinma.

Well, it’s basically a frog, snake, and alligator level. When the frogs and snake came out, once I found out about the 3 types I thought that the other type would be a slug, but it was an alligator.

Although now that I think about it, a slug would be kind of weird in the wetlands.

“Kaerujinma and jyasouma were defeated, so we’re investigating whether the gyakujinma will increase too much. Subjugating them is secondary; the main thing is figuring out how much of a threat they are.”

Two of the three major threats took a lot of damage, so now we’re investigating the alligators’ area to see if they’ve increased too much, and if they have, then we’ll make plans to subjugate them.

The level has an ecosystem, and if it’s recklessly destroyed then some sort of phenomenon occurring is expected; it seems like the big disaster three years ago was also the result of the monsters’ power balance being destroyed.

“Well yeah, if we don’t look into it now, it’ll get nasty, *na*. Mr kaerujinmas came out, and that big ass jyasouma even showed up is what they said. There could be something fishy going on, on this level ... Ramis, if it gets seriously bad, you gotta pull out.”

“Ok. If it gets too dangerous, I’ll run away with Hakkon. Ri~ght?”

“Welcome.”

In order to be able to put up Barrier at any time, I have to remember to be vigilant at all times while on the expedition.

If I was normal, there would be all sorts of preparations I'd have to make, but I don't really have to do anything in particular. I guess just taking a look at new products and trying to see if they'd fit the situation is about all I have to do. A-, I need to sell ingredients in bulk to the food stalls.

And then, I'll sell a lot of beverages cheap at Munami's temporary eatery. I'm going to be gone from the community for a while, so I need to make it so the regular customers can replenish themselves.

Since it's widely known throughout the community that I'll be leaving with the Fools of Whimsy Brigade for a while, customers kept coming late into the night, and quite a few of them were stocking up.



The next morning, Ramis and Hyurumi are taking their breakfast next to me.

Ramis is participating in the expedition so I understand why she's got leather armor and boots on, but other than that she only has a small bag swinging and that's it. As well as a wooden rack with straps to carry me.

For food there's me, so there's no problem, and for light, I light up, so that's also fine. When sleeping, I can put my heating function to work, so whether it needs to be hot or cold, I can preserve a comfortable temperature. I can even put out a bath towel.

With that, I have most things accounted for. And then, since she has to carry me, she can't bring much other large luggage. Most of the necessary things are going to be prepared by the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, so there's no need to worry about it too much, huh?

"Yo-. Ramis, Hakkon. All set?"

Appearing along with his voice and trademark ten gallon hat slanted on his brow is a

man with a scraggly beard, Leader Keryoil. Next to him is the blue-haired vice leader, Filmina-san.

“Good morning everyone. As long as there are not any problems, there should be a luggage carriage waiting at the gate.”

“Okaaaay. We’re ready. Hakkon, let’s go. Heave ho-!”

Like always, she lightly carries me, and follows behind the Leader and Vice-Leader. We were always inside the community during winter, so it’s been a while since we’ve gone outside. Recently, rather than saying it’s another world, it feels like we’re shooting a fantasy movie.

During winter the people who carry dangerous-looking things had become few and the simply dressed people had increased, so I’d forget that I was in another world from time to time. Maa, the Bear President and other animal-faced people would show up from time to time, so I’d get pulled back to reality, though.

In this world the beastkin aren’t the fancy kind with just cat ears and tail, they’re the ones with the face of the animal. The frog-men are like that too, but they’re the type where only the skeleton is kind of like a human.

“Living in these walls be constraining, *na*. If ya don’t take a breath outside, you’ll go crazy.”

“Welcome.”

I replied, but I only just now realized that Hyurumi was lined up walking next to us. So she’s seeing us off.

“That over there’s the luggage cart the Whimsy Brigade is using.”

In the direction Hyurumi stabbed her finger is a huge luggage cart pulled by a unasusu. It’s pulled up a bit in front of the gate, and next to it are Karios and Gols, as well as the Brigade member Hunters, idly chatting.

“O-, Ramis, Hakkon. So you’ve been added to come. A, hang on. Let me stockpile a few more.”

“I’m going to buy some too.”

Since I won’t see you for a while, I recommend buying and stocking up now.

Since they’re buying in bulk, I tampered with the winning chance of the lottery slots, for Gols. Recently the riajuu appeals have been annoying, but it’s not like I’m favoring him.

“A-, Leader-san brought you guys, *ne*. Ramis-san, Hakkon-san, good to have you-.”

“Ou, we welcome you two fine people ... one person and one box? Good to have you-“

“Good to have you, good to have you-“

This Brigade seems to get along with each other really well; they do tentatively have a hierarchy, but basically everyone’s pretty overly familiar with each other. All the members of the Fools of Whimsy Brigade are the Leader, Vice Leader, and all the Hunter-like girl who was there when we were subjugating the frog-men. As well as two young men, twins who get along well.

“Alri-ght, let’s go. Hurry up and get ready.”

Urging the twins who were relaxing within the canopied luggage area, Leader Keryoil kicked at the wheel. The twins switched to the driver’s seat, and the Leader and Vice Leader boarded the luggage area.

“Ramis and Hakkon climb in as well.”

“No. I’ll run there like this! That way I’ll get some training. And I think if I put Hakkon on, the unasusu will have a hard time.”

Maa, I’m about the weight of several adults, na. Once everyone gets on, it might be a big burden.

“kay, then I’ll get on instead.”

So saying, the Hyurumi who should have only been here to see us off hopped on. Wait, eeee-

“E, Hyurumi’s coming too?”

“*Ousu*. If it’s monster ecology examination, it be better to have someone with lots of knowledge, right? I properly took the commission from the Bear President.”

So you didn’t say anything just to surprise us, huh? Come to think of it, she wasn’t exactly acting like she was all that worried.

Their name is, well, that, but the Fools of Whimsy Brigade is definitely good at what they do, enough to be used as an escort, so I guess even the combat-less Hyurumi will be fine, but I don’t really know much about this world where monsters exist.

When the monsters get near you’ll raise a defense, but if you go by the standard, removing Ramis, typically you’d hide in the luggage area.

Adventuring, huh ... I’ve been reincarnated as a vending machine in another world, and should only live out the rest of my life just selling items, but to think that I can go exploring a labyrinth like this.

Life – – of a vending machine’s that is, is something you can’t predict.²

While being shaken on Ramis’ back, as she runs at the same speed as the luggage cart, I’m deeply moved as I watch the community receding into the distance.

1. Spring can refer to love, specifically the mutual, early stages of love where you can only see each other’s good points, and being a couple is the best thing ever- ! ... Something like that?

2. literally “Jinsei (a human’s life) – jidou hanbaiki sei (a vending machine’s life)”

CHAPTER 33

COMPANION FOR THE JOURNEY

I'm staring at the sky over the meadow with clouds floating over it here and there, but I'm being transported by a girl ... if you think about it too deeply, you'll lose. About three hours have passed since we departed early in the morning, so for the moment we are taking a short break.

The large unasusu still seems to have more than enough strength, and Ramis, who ran alongside it, also doesn't show any weariness in her actions. It's not the first time I've thought it, but what an outrageous physical ability this girl has.

So it's kind of like why even take a break, but it seems to be a toilet break. The proportion of ladies in this line-up is significant, so the places you can do your business and the timing are problems. It's not like they can just stand off on the side and do their 'little' business like guys can.

Although it's not an issue in a game, it's an issue in real-life, huh? *Are*, come to think of it, there's THAT for this kind of situation, *na*.

Looking down the Functions column, I select THAT, and by consuming Points I acquire it. And then, I immediately change to use it.

I've already been left behind next to the cart, but the twins and the hunter-like girls who watched me change form dropped their mouths wide-open. So these people hadn't seen this before.

"*Are*, Hakkon be showing us some function again. N? What the, there's something attached next to him, *zo*."

Like Hyurumi said, this time I didn't change my main body but a new object has made its appearance next to me. It's a long and narrow locker-like object, with a height exactly the same as me.

The bottom half is a trash can. The top half has a lid inserted, and if you undo it, inside is a folded up chair, a cardboard box, and a long, thin piece of cardboard stowed in it.

“What is this? If Hakkon takes it out with this kind of timing, this gotta have some meaning to it.”

“Welcome.”

“For now, it ok to open it and take stuff out?”

“Welcome.”

As Hyurumi took out the contents without any hesitation, Ramis and the Fools of Whimsy Brigade crowded around and peeped over here with great interest.

“This is, a collapsible chair, huh? But how come there a gaping hole where you sit? This box made of this weird-ass feeling material, inside there’s some mysterious paper? It’s probably ok to open it, *na*.”

“Welcome.”

“I’m just gonna do what I want, so if I shouldn’t, just stop me. ‘Kay then, this tough paper is actually a bag.”

“*Nee*, Hyurumi. Doesn’t that bag look like it would fit through that hole in the chair perfectly?”

“*Nnn-*, *o-*. Perfect fit. Good going, Ramis. Then, this other thin box. Open this as well ... inside is a transparent bag, and in that is ... *uooo-*”

When took it out, with a *pop* sound, it expanded out three times as long. That’s a folded up tent, a convenient item that you just need to spread out and it opens.

“Th,that freaked me out. It just took on a pre-set shape; if I just touch it a bit, it’ll go back to its former shape? It might be similar to a magic tool.”

Like her curiosity overtook her fright, she was bent over, somehow spreading out the little tent.

“It’s some sort of tent that one person can set up by himself. Put the chair with the hole in it and the bag inside ... Oi oi, don’t tell me, this a toilet!?”

As Hyurumi shouted, the color of the womens’ eyes changed.

That’s right, this is an emergency service installed next to the vending machine, a simple emergency toilet. With the great repeated disasters in the current years, toilets have become a serious issue. For that, the vending machine manufacturers installed a service box with a simple toilet inside.

They’re still few in number, but I sincerely wanted to support these prepared manufacturers, so when I find one I’ll always buy something.

“When you close the panel of the little tent, there be no chance of people seeing you ‘neither. And after you use the bag, you can close it up and the smell will be contained too.”

“A,are you serious-!?”

The Vice-Leader Filmina-san raised a rare yell and approached Hyurumi, who was still explaining.

“Y,yeah. I’m probably not mistaken. Inside the bag there’s stuff in the bottom that gives off a scent, and it seems to be something to combat the smell of piss. *Naa*, Hakkon.”

“Welcome.”

“There ya go, that’s what it is.”

The women whose eyes changed color swarmed the simple toilet in a ‘me first’ fashion. First, Hyurumi tested it out to see how it worked, and when she emerged with a satisfied face, the women all lined up to use it.

“Hakkon. This is seriously wicked awesome. This be something that Hunters would pull out gold coins for, y’know?”

It looks like the womens’ toilet situation was even more serious than I thought. Since this is an emergency service, it doesn’t take money.

Maa, afterwards, the Hunters who used the toilet bought beverages from me in gratitude, so it’s fine.

“What do you think? Because I solicited Hakkon, you can use such a convenient toilet. *Saa*, it’s fine to praise your great Leader more!”

“Hakkon’s the amazing one; it has nothing to do with Leader.”

Filmina-san cut him off coldly over her shoulder; the back of Leader as he walked away looked a little forlorn.

After the great success of the simple toilet, they took the bag and buried it in a hole. The things that come from the products have the possibility of disappearing, so when thinking about ground contamination, if the bag disappears, the waste will just return to the earth, probably.

The simple toilet was folded up and stored in the cart. Since the Emergency Set consumed points, it won’t disappear so I’ll let them have it. Although I’ll retrieve it after the expedition is over.

“Let’s take an early lunch next.”

Alright, now it’s time for the real job. I’ve sneakily lined up products at half the price I sell them for in the community. Normally, in this type of situation you would sell them at a higher price, but since the Fools of Whimsy Brigade promised me payment before, I’m doing this as a favor for good publicity for the next time Ramis does Hunter activities.

“This compacted and grilled cereal is tastyyy.”

“O, seriously. This strongly-seasoned pasta is also real good.”

The guy twins are getting along and splitting the food. One of them has red hair, and the other has white hair. In my head, I’m going to call them the Red-White Combo.¹ By the way, people call them just like that, “Red” and “White”.

“Haaa, to be able to enjoy such great food while on an expedition, I’m so happy and grateful.”

The archer girl who has hair short enough to see her neck, so that you could mistake her for a boy at a glance, raised her high-pitched, anime moe-character voice.

Takoyaki, yakisoba, cup ramen, kara’age², and a 2 litre of cola are placed — no, were placed in front of her. All of the contents within have disappeared. She’s a small-sized woman, but she completely demolished all of that by herself. Her manner of eating is as frightening as an eating-contest champion’s.

“Shui is a big eater as always. Thanks to Hakkon-san, we don’t have to worry about how much food we have remaining this time.”

With one finger toying with her blue, wavy hair, Vice-Leader Filmina lets out a sigh. Just bringing a big eater like this along for a long-term expedition, you’ll run out of food reserves immediately.

“You mean this time you won’t make us go out to catch a monster to roast whole-!?”

“Aa, what a relief ... seriously, what a relief.”

The Red-White twins are so happy they’re hugging each other. So previously they’ve had to go catch a monster to eat each time, huh? Snake seems like it could be tasty, but I wonder how frog people would be. Come to think of it, the first time I met Ramis, it seems she had been catching frog people to eat.

So the inhabitants of this other world pretty much don’t have any aversion to eating monsters. Normally, when out of civilization, Hunter cooking is pretty much just canned goods with salt and herbs, so I can understand the emotional delight from

having vending machine food.

With the simple toilet, temporarily accompanying a Hunter Team and doing business seems like I can rake in quite some profits. And since she's here as help to carry the vending machine me, the possibilities of Ramis getting hurt decreases.

But, if you're thinking about safety, it would be best to attach ourselves to a prominent brigade like this Fools of Whimsy Brigade, but ... *u-n*. I can debate about it in my head all I want, but the decision lies with Ramis. I don't even have one piece of advice, but through this time's expedition, I'll examine this brigade.

I've made this decision and hidden it inside myself, but right now, there's nothing in particular about them. After the break we resume our pace; the occasional frog person and small, though adult-sized, twin-headed snake are so far away that they just shoot arrows or water magic at them.

Aside from that, once in a while the Leader lying on top of the canopy will throw a knife, and a monster will sprout a knife in its head before falling over.

They're definitely in a different class. I understand the young Hunters' admiration. I was there while they fought the King Frogman, and in the situations where I had time to observe them, I unconsciously let out a sigh of admiration.

Here where the opponents don't even get close, the close-combat twins and Ramis don't get a chance to show off.

"Hakkon. I wonder if it's okay for me not to do anything. Do you think it'd be ok to throw rocks?"

Throwing rocks, huh. Fundamentally it's clumsy, but it makes proper use that super-human strength, *na*. I wonder if I have any good that's suitable for throwing.

If you wrap a chain around me and spin me around, it would deal quite the heavy damage, but Ramis definitely won't go for it. *U-n*, throwing weapons, huh? How about an old, nostalgic, glass-bottled juice? If it's that, then it has the right weight and hardness, and I can have some hopes to its might. Its size is also hand, so it should make throwing easy.

In order to try it out, I stock the glass-bottled juice and then tried dropping one.

Right now I'm being carried on her back while she's facing forward, so with an impossible posture that looks like her arm stretched out to grab it, Ramis somehow managed to extract it while walking.

"N? This is that fizzy poppy juice, *ne. Are*, it's in something different, it's harder."

"It so you can throw it, ain't it?"

Popping her face out of the cart, Hyurumi made that suggestion.

Reaching an understanding, Ramis *pon* clapped her hands and gave a great nod. With perfect timing, a frogman appeared up ahead, and with the glass-bottled juice in hand, she wielded it and threw it.

It went flying off in the wrong direction, and the glass-bottled juice disappeared into the brush; the frog man gave an amazed look and ducked.

"*Urgh*, how frustratiing."

She really does have way more strength than she knows what to do with it. So she does have the possibility of throwing, but her precision leaves something to be desired, is what it boils down to. It's almost like it would be more likely to hit if I threw it.

Maa, right after, the frogman was easily shot through the crown of his head and defeated. It looks like Ramis won't get to show off for a while.

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1. Kouhaku – referring to festive colors both red and white. Red is *aka*, white is *shiro*, but *kouhaku* is red-and-white together, like saying, "That flag is red (*aka*), that flag is white (*shiro*), and that flag is red-and-white (*kouhaku*)."
 2. The joke(?) is that he's simplifying them from 2 people to 1 entity. Yeah, not something that goes well into translation.

3. takoyaki – balls of salty batter with octopus bits grilled
4. yakisoba – thin buckwheat noodles stir-fried with veggies and meat of various sorts in soy-sauce-based sauce
5. kara'age – bits of chicken, breaded and fried, with a soy-sauce-based marinade

CHAPTER 34

DEALING WITH ALLIGATORS

The boar cargo cart came to a stop due to a cave-in in the rocky mountains; lying down on top of the cart's canopy, lying fully stretched out, is a man.

"FUAAAAaaa. We're about to enter those guys' habitat, so you guys, look sharp, yo-"

"Then, I think Leader should come down from the top of the canopy."

"Maybe I should stab him with my spear from underneath."

I think it's a good idea. Nice suggestion, Red-White twins.

Two days have passed since we left the community, and we're now facing the third day. It's now a time when the star that I believe to be like the sun has reached it's zenith overhead, and it seems we are now about to enter the gakujinma's (alligator men) territory.

"Leader, enough already; I want you to come down at once. We need to scout and investigate, right?"

"Ka-y. For crying out loud, what a short-tempered Vice-Leader."

Holding down his hat with his right hand so it doesn't go flying, Leader Keryoil jumped down. It's frustrating, but with that movement, I thought he looked cool for a second.

"N, then, Red and White. We're counting on you to scout ahead."

"Understood-"

"Aye aye sir-"

So these two are in charge of scouting, huh?

Just by looks, I thought they'd be the kind of characters who would be in charge of raising the spirits of the rear guards, though. *Hooray, hooray*; the types that would be the ones to say that type of thing.

Even though their faces aren't bad, because of their frivolous tone and way too laidback dispositions, it seems like Ramis and Hyurumi won't fall for them even by mistake.

As for weapons, Red has a somewhat short spear. White has a short sword. Their equipment has the feel of a business shirt made out of a heavy material; the color is a faded brown. They've been used quite a bit, it seems.

O-, their expressions went straight all of a sudden. Their eyes have sharpened, and the atmosphere they had about them changed in a second. If they were always like this, they'd probably be popular with women.

Taking a low stance, the two disappeared into the tall grass. Just walking in a wetland should make it hard to take a step, but they're moving without even a sound. Completely different from their looks, they're excellently capable people, huh?

"Alright then, now we wait leisurely for some time. Hakkon, are there any tasty snacks?"

"The sweet tea for me"

"Welcome."

So it's Leader and Vice-Leader's relaxation time. They don't have even a fraction of worry. The other short hair, female brigade member that was there only fine-tunes her bow; there's not a single concern towards the two that disappeared. Is it trust that they have?

Ramis leans on me from the backside, and, seemingly feeling good, takes a nap. Hyurumi seems interested in the construction of the can, so she swigged it all in one gulp and fidgeted with it and turned it over, writing things down in a notepad.

They're way too defenseless in this area where the gakujinma roam, but their abilities are top notch. There's probably no need for me to keep an eye out. However, I never want to make the mistake from before due to carelessness again.



The sun is about halfway set, and each of the Fools of Whimsy Brigade began to make preparations for camping. Ramis wanted to help, but she was gently refused. With her super-human strength, the fixtures and tools would be broken, so I guess they're being cautious against that.

She sits next to me looking slightly lonely, so I give her a present of hot milk tea.

Don't be so bothered by it, it's fine to be cared for. Look at Hyurumi; she's over there with her belly showing, full-heartedly scratching while fast asleep ... it's better if you don't imitate that.

"We're back, yo –"

"We're home–"

Uo-, that scared me. Exactly when were the Red-White twins standing, lined up, next to me? It's unknown whether a vending machine has the ability to detect presences, but I completely didn't notice them at all.

"Leader. We checked around."

"Good job. We'll be having dinner in a bit, so before that, go ahead."

"Aye aye sir-. Uuum, it's probably about 2 hours northeast from here, *na*, Red?"

"Seems like, *na*, White. There's a small bog there, with about 30 of them splish-splashing around in there."

So they call each other Red and White too. It's kind of a careless report, but is it going to be ok with that; I'm a bit worried.

“So there’s 30 gathered; with that much in a flock, how’s it?”

The Leader’s gaze went towards Hyurumi, who was now examining the material of a plastic bottle immediately after waking up.

“N-, it’s a flock if it’s over ten, it’s on the big side if it fifty, but it’s less you say. If it be thirty, than it a mid-sized flock. What’s the size of a single one?”

“N-to, standing up, it’s about our size, *na* White.”

“Yup, Red. I thought it was overall the same.”

They’re a little shorter than me, so about 175; they’re quite the large-sized creature. If I take the approximation from the frogmen and apply it to alligators, the spine will extend and it will walk on 2 legs; if the arms and legs are about that long, than it seems it will be kinda slow.

“It seems a bit shorter than usual. It usually about two meters in height. If the frogs increased but the flock didn’t, then it could be they didn’t attack and were short on food ... naw, if there’s thirty around, then they could manage against a group of about 100.”

So you mean, if we figure it simply, that means the alligatormen have three times the power of the frogmen. It’s an alligator, with hard skin that can be used as armor, and the tail and gigantic mouth make splendid weapons. It’s not a mystery where that increase in power comes from.

“We aren’t specialists on the hierarchy of this level, so we don’t really understand. The gakujinma(alligatormen), I guess they are the strongest of the three great powers on this level. If the kaerujinma(frogmen)increased, then the food increases, so shouldn’t it be hip hip hooray for them?”

“If ya think about it normally. But this time there be a King kaerujinma. It’s unknown as to how a King comes around, but that thing has stupid-ass fighting power, so it’s a problem when it’s commanding a group. They gather together small groups and wrangle in the stragglers.”

“So what you mean is, the gakujinma aren’t going to carelessly lay their hands on that. And the jyasouma (double-headed snake) too, that’s why it would prefer to go after the community.”

A-, that was something I was curious about. Normally, jyasoumas are things that go about acting alone, being large creatures that measure two meters front to back is what I heard.

“After a jyasouma eats, it sheds and then repeats and gets bigger; that’s the kind of creature it is. Just, it got meat that’s a fine-quality item that you can get high prices for, so there’s a lot of Hunters that go after them. They prowl around alone, so they the best prey.”

So the kaerujinma(frogmen) are targeted by gakujinma(alligatormen) and jyasouma(double-headed snake).

The jyasouma (double-headed snake) is aimed at by the Hunters.

The gakujinma(alligatormen) is ... neglection play?

“*Maa*, so it that. Their food all gathered to the King’s side, the jyasouma ate the few stragglers left behind, and they got so big that it be hard to do something against them. And then, ain’t it that their food dwindled and so they got weaker?”

“I see now-. Well then, isn’t it better if we don’t do anything in particular and don’t meddle in it?”

“Leader. The gakujinma are meat eaters, right? If their food supply is gone right now, to quell the starvation, exactly what do you think they will attack?”

“*Maa*, it would be us humans, huh? Alright then, let’s wipe ‘em all out.”

Exactly what will happen to this level’s ecosystem then? If the monsters are completely wiped out, would it be that they just disappear from the level? Or would it be some kind of mysterious dungeon power that will bring forth an outbreak?

If I asked Hyurumi I’m sure she’d happily teach me, but I don’t have a way to ask the question.

“That’s true. If we wipe out the flocks near the community, there should be no problems.”

Vice-Leader Filmina agrees with him, on this rare occasion.

Oh yeah, the Seiryu Lake’s level is something you can’t reach from one end to another within three weeks. I can understand that there’d be no problems if we wipe out the flocks within 2, 3 days of the community.

“And so, seriously, what should we do? The request was to bring back information on the flocks, see. We don’t have to particularly go out of our way to defeat any; our pay is still guaranteed.”

“But the materials off of them sell for a lot. We can lend a hand in weakening the main force by reducing some of them. The materials can sell for a lot, you know.”

Are, Vice-Leader Filmina is strangely proactive. E, is the Fools of Whimsy Brigade going through a management crisis?

“Vice-Leader’s always someone who argues when it comes to money, *na*.”

“Even though she’s usually someone who’s calm and collected, *na*.”

“Previously, even though I didn’t eat all that much, she got so mad.”

The brigade members gathered together and exchanged words in low voices.

So this is just the miserly potential, huh ... but next to the careless-seeming Leader, you’d become strict concerning money. Just looking at him, I think it seems like a tough position to be in.

“Deciding to subjugate them aside, how to do it? Do the stereotypical night assault?”

“I think ya should avoid that. Gakujinma be nocturnal creatures. They get more ferocious at night.”

“He-, is that so.”

He-, so it’s like that. A-, Ramis said that. Seriously, Hyurumi’s a walking encyclopedia.

The ecology of alligators... Previously, when I went to the zoo to see an animal-feed vending machine, when I peeked into the alligator corner, what was it that was written there?

If I remember right, alligator feed is ... I think I have memories of seeing it written as fish and chicken meat. Vending machines don’t deal with raw meats. Fish ... as boiled paste ... so, chikuwa aside, there aren’t any.

As for other characteristics, a-, there’s talk about the frogmen being weak in winter, so alligatormen should also be weaker in the cold. Alligators are cold-blooded, so the possibility is there.

In the first place, they were saying that we should scout out the alligatormen before they entered their active period. Right now we’re just about to enter spring and the temperature has risen. Cold weather, huh ... *are*, I can do that, can’t I?

“So then, tonight we’ll fully rest our bodies and tomorrow morning we’ll make our move. We’ll crush every single one that moves away from the flock and make it flashy ZO-“

“That’s right. Then, since we’re going in tomorrow, let’s make dinner. Red and White, please be the look-outs.”

“Eee-. Even though we just got back from all that scouting just now.”

“Oppression – . Leader, requesting better working conditions –“

“Yeah yeah, I’ll help out too, so let’s go.”

Going between the twins who are expressing their dissatisfaction and winding her arms through theirs, the archer woman drags them off.

After finishing off the meal made by the ingredients I offered, Ramis and Hyurumi came forward with a request about keeping watch, and I went along with their request. I tentatively switched the vending machine's light off.

"So the fight's tomorrow. That bein' the case, I ain't gonna be any help. Ramis and Hakkon too, don't overdo it. It be possible that your opponents will be more vicious 'cause of starvation. If it gets wicked bad, Hakkon, protect with Barrier."

"Welcome."

"I'll be relying on you, Hakkon."

You got it. Protection related business is my business. I have more than enough points by quite a bit, so when the time comes, I'll sink them all into defense.

"If I can do anythin' ta help, that would be good, *na*." (Hyurumi)

A, that's right The method I just thought of, if it's Hyurumi, I bet she could guess it. Anyway, let's try it out and see.

"If we're talking about the gakujinma's weaknesses ... *O-*, what's up, Hakkon? You be another weird-ass shape."

I've become a slimmer shape than usual; my body is mostly white, and on top of that, the letters [ICE] have floated to the surface. My retrieval opening is much bigger, enough space for a small bucket to easily enter.

"I wonder what this sells. Hakkon never transforms without a reason, *ne*."

You understand me, *ne*, Ramis. As for what I'm selling, as soon as you see the goods you'll understand.

I operate the vending machine, and down dropped ice cubes into the opening. This is, usually placed in supermarkets and fish markets, an ice vending machine.

“O-, this is ice, huh? If it was summer, this would make a killin’, I bet.”

“*Fuwa*, it’s so cold. But, putting ice out like this, I wonder what we should do with it.”

“If we follow the flow of the conversation just now, this ice is to help defeat the gakujinma.

“It must be to throw it-!”

It’s a very Ramis idea, but that one’s “Too bad”.

“Ice, the gakujinma, and their ecology; if it’s like this, there bee only one answer. Hakkon, can ya put out all this frozen stuff like fool gone crazy?”

“Welcome.”

“So that be it. Ain’t this going to be interesting?”

“*Ne, ne*, I want to know too, so tell me-!”

A, Ramis, who couldn’t follow the discussion, puffed out her cheeks and sulked.

I’ll leave the detailed explanation to Hyurumi. Because I can’t bend over to listen to what’s being said ... I’ll entrust it to you. In exchange, I’ll keep doing my best to keep watch.

Whiling watching over them, trying to soothe Ramis, I expand my omni-directional field of vision to the maximum it can go and, before she’s pacified, I do the watch on my own.



The next day, Hyurumi explained the plan to the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, and since they were all for it, they’re going to cooperate with us. With the Red-White twins leading the way, we reached the banks of the brook that flowed into the pond, and once I was situated there, I poured ice into it.

The brook can't be more than thirty centimeters in width looking at it, so the volume of water isn't significant, but it's the perfect conditions for the ice to float on the surface of the water and flow in.

Saa, keep it going. *Maa*, I have my doubts as to how much this ice will be able to lower the water's temperature, but for my plans for the bog, it shouldn't matter too much. It's early spring, so the water should still be cold enough so that the ice shouldn't melt much. The bog the alligatormen live in is shallow, so like that the water temperature should lower ... if it manages to work like that, that'd be great.

The time when the gakujinma are in the water is the absolute worst to have, so if the water temperature is low enough that they don't want to leave the bog, it seems that would help out a lot. Like that, the ice is going to be a great play to make.

Clack clack with clinking noises the ice was emitted in huge quantities. The conversion from Points to ice is really light, so even if I continued to put it out for about an hour, there would be no feeling of sacrifice.

And with this, if the temperature goes down a little bit and make those guys move weaker, that is also a profit. If it makes Ramis' battles easier, just this amount of expenditure is cheap spending.

CHAPTER 35

ALLIGATOR KILLING

“Leader. The gakujinma are getting up onto the bank. It looks like they’re shivering because it’s cold, *yo*-. Seems like they’re lying down listlessly.” (Red)

When Red, who had gone to scout the situation of the bog, came back, he gave his report.

Leader Keryoil, sprawled on top of a large rock, said, “Good job,” lifting a hand.

“It looks like a good situation, but even if you say they can’t move, the other ones of those guys will respond if we attack. Vice-Leader, is it possible to use Fog Magic to obstruct their vision?” (Keryoil)

“It’s not like I can’t, but if you wanted me to cover the entire bog, it’s impossible.” (Fulmina)

Oo, Fog Magic huh? Mist floating above a bog has an elegant sound to it, *na*.

I would definitely love to see it, but the area it needs to effect is too big, huh? If you want an outbreak of fog in the swamp, then this time, if I use that, I can lend a hand.

“Then, what are we going to do? Split those guys apart ... watcha doing, Hakkon?” (Keryoil)

Seeing me changing my form, Leader Keryoil’s hat slid down. This time’s form change is the type that has a silver body with a transparent door attached halfway up.

Upon opening the door, the contents in there is a silver tube, from which a white mass dropped. From that a white vapor rose and ascended; it was all contained inside.

“N, what is this? It’s too cloudy to be ice. It’s something like snow clumped together and hardened?” (Keryoil)

Since he's curious, Leader jumped off of the big rock and brought his face close to the white clump, peering at it. When he went to poke it with his finger, I dropped more of THAT and said a "Too bad."

"Leader-san. I think Hakkon might be trying to say that you shouldn't touch that, *na*."
(Red/White)

"If you touch it with your bare hands, it might be dangerous, I think." (White/Red)

"Welcome." (Hakkon)

The two are correct. It would be easier to show them than explain, so I dropped more and more like crazy; the white clumps that overflowed from my retrieval opening fell into the river.

The moment it touched the water, the white clump erupted in huge plumes of vapor.

"Uo-, what the!? Smoke is coming out like crazy!" (Keryoil)

Leaping to the side, away from right in front of me, he stared at the white smoke emitting and streaming from the white clumps – the dry ice. That was a great reaction, Leader.

I think everyone's played with dry ice, putting it in water to emit white vapor, at least once. With this I think it could be a substitute for mist, but what do you guys think?

"Hakkon-san. This is amazing! With this, mixed with my Fog Magic, we might be able to cover the whole bog area!" (Fulmina)

"Ain't you so capable, Hakkon. Can't expect any less from the magic tool I got my eye on." (Hyurumi)

"Much more useful than Leader, *ne*." (Fulmina)

"Guwa-!" (Keryoil)

With Fulmina the Vice-Leader's cold-hearted declaration, Leader clasped a hand to his

chest and fell back.

“Mou, we should hurry up and make Hakkon the Leader.” (White)

“That’s a really good idea, White. The name ‘Fools of Whimsy Brigade’ is a lame name too, so let’s change it to the cuter sounding ‘Hakkon Brigade.’” (Red)

“Y, you guys, I really wracked my brains to come up with that; to think that that’s what you really think about a name just overflowing with good taste-.” (Keryoil)

As Red and White continued the harsh pursuit, Leader resisted them.

“Well, I mean, it’s whimsical fools –ssuyo. Since the ‘Hakkon Brigade’ sounds cute, it seems like it would be popular with girls. If Hakkon-san becomes the leader, I’d be able to eat all I want, *ne!* I’m in agreement!” (Shui)

“UOOOOooo” (Keryoil)

The female brigade member finished him off. Leader crouched, hitting the ground. How pitiful.

“Alright, alright. Let’s leave the horsing around at that. Leader, don’t give in to your inferiority complex and give out your orders.” (Fulmina)

“*Ke-*, you guys do whatever you’re supposed to and defeat them. Your useless Leader is just going to watch over here while drinking sweet tea.” (Keryoil)

Aa, he’s kicking a rock on the riverbank; it’s easy to see that he’s sulking. Are you a child?

What this Leader said didn’t pass at all, and his brigade members dragged him off.

“Uum, I want to go too, but we can’t just leave Hakkon behind here, *ne*. Then, can you watch house here, Hyurumi?” (Ramis)

“Welcome.”

“Ya, don’t worry, just go. If it get dangerous, get back here.” (Hyurumi)

‘Un, I’m off, *ne-*’ (Ramis)

While I still have the duty to continue to drop dry ice I can’t move from here, but it makes me uneasy to not be together. She’s only weak against opponents who hunt in big groups, so I think she’d only get done in if she’s careless, but I’m worried if she’s not there at my back.

“Maa, don’t get so worried. The Fools of Whimsy Brigade be an amazing Hunter brigade. They also know when to quit. If it gets bad, they’ll get back over here.” (Hyurumi)

As she *bang bang* strikes my body, she seems to have apprehensions too.

I will believe that it will be fine. I have to concentrate on my own job or else. Dropping the dry ice in the brook, I can’t do anything but stare in the direction that the disappears in the midst of the overflowing mist.

“I’m bored, Hakkon.” (Hyurumi)

“Welcome.” (Hakkon)

One person and one box who are bad in combat can’t do anything but this. I have to continue sending down dry ice, but even though I was reincarnated into another world, I don’t have any fighting techniques; it leaves an unforgivable feeling.

“I’m just gonna blabber because I’m bored, so keep me company.” (Hyurumi)

“Welcome.” (Hakkon)

“This time I got the task of reconnaissance, but I wanna talk about the request I got directly from the President. The request is, recently Seiryu Lake’s level be acting weird so investigate. That’s how it is. If this time the gakujinma are bein’ weird too, then we gotta be wary.” (Hyurumi)

The King Frog and the over-sized giant snake. I might not be an original citizen of this world, but even I realize that the state of things is weird. Furthermore, I also think there's something or other about the gakujinma.

"I don't think Hakkon knows, but each level has some existence ya call the Ruler. Ya have to defeat that in order to be able to unlock the next level. If that happens, once the level's Ruler gets defeated, it's rare for it not to revive. But the revival is pretty rare. We don't get the requirements even today, but there are even some times when it takes several years, or even several tens of years." (Hyurumi)

Ruler, huh? The boss character that often appears on the level of a dungeon. In front of the stairs that connect down to the next level, in front of doors, it's an existence that lies in wait.

"And so, the President thinks that all this mess be from the Ruler reviving. The Leader from the Fools of Whimsy Brigade are also saying this. That's why if there's any hint of something seriously wrong, they'll retreat without even considerin' anything else. Oh yeah, if ya beat that Ruler, rumor has it you can get your hands on some awesome treasure, although that's a lie." (Hyurumi)

This time's reconnaissance is quite the important task. But I wonder what kind of creature this level's Ruler is. A frog, alligator, snake mix chimera?

As you'd think, being really big is the standard for that. It's probably over 5 meters in body length, I bet. If there's a spot where I can observe safely, I'd like to check it out.

If the Ruler really did revive, it might be better to consider moving to another level or above ground. Maa, I'll have to leave all of that up to these two girls as well.

I'm interested in the existence called the Ruler, but right now, Ramis' safety ... thinking of it, I'm uneasy, thinking that something is going to go wrong.

"But ya know, no matter what, there ain't much risk for us pullin' the attentions of the Ruler." (Hyurumi)

Hyurumi, we call that a flag *dazo*. If I keep that bad premonition to myself, it won't happen so I'll be careful.

Understanding that, I didn't let out even one retort, but that thought immediately disappeared.

"What is this shaking ..." (Hyurumi)

Bit by bit, the part of me that was connected to the ground transmitted the sensation of vibrations. There's nothing but bad premonitions, but I direct my line of sight to the origin of the sound – I can see the boar cart stampeding in this direction. The canopy of the cart has been completely destroyed, so the people inside are completely visible.

In the driver's seat are the red and white-haired twins. Behind them with a flustered face is Leader. And then, facing behind them is the archer Shui and Vice-Leader Fulmina firing arrows and magic.

Ramis is, where is Ramis!? Right now, in the range of view I have, Ramis' figure is ... there-!

She's deposited in the back of the cart, and her eyes are closed and she's not moving. Is she ok!?

"Oi oi oi, you've got to be kidding me! Shit, we were right on the money. The Ruler's come out-!" (Keryoil)

Ruler!? If I could say what I wanted, I'd yell that out right back at him.

The thing that Hyurumi's been staring dumbly at since a while ago is, chasing after the boar cart, a small mountain.

I'm not trying to be funny. There is something that I can't think of as anything else but a small mountain that's chasing after those guys from behind.

You wouldn't be able to see the boar carts figure; if you pulled back and looked at it from far away to see the whole thing, that's how absurdly big this thing is. The full form is a giant alligator. It's just, you have to ignore that it has eight legs and four eyes.

The bottoms of those feet alone are enough to completely hide the boar cart, that's how enormous they are. I expected it to be big, but this way exceeds the norm. People are supposed to be able to beat this thing!?

With the eight legs, rather than lessening the vibrations, it's like it's to the extent that my vending machine body is floating.

“Aa, shit. It awakened to the point of breaking the level-!” (Hyurumi)

Hyurumi spat that out with great annoyance. Her gaze is on the crack running through the ground in front of the chaser; I can see light spilling out from it. So that’s the “breaking the level” she’s talking about, huh?

I don’t really get it, but at the very least, I understand that it’s nothing good.

Wh,what should we do? The boar cart is running full out in this direction. They might be able to recover Hyurumi, but the time they have to pick me up is ... none.

Then, it’s decided that I’m going to do what I can to send her off-!

“Ramis is just unconscious, she’s okay! Hyurumi, reach over! Grab my hand-!” (Keryoil)

“And what we gonna do about Hakkon!? Ya saying we should leave him-!?” (Hyurumi)

“Welcome.” (Hakkon)

I answer the question that was directed at Leader.

Hyurumi stared dumbly at me. I activate <Barrier>, and because Hyurumi was close to me, she was pushed away.

“Hakkon, what’s the meaning of this-!” (Hyurumi)

“Sorry about this, Hakkon. After this, we will definitely come back to pick you up!” (Keryoil)

Running past me, Leader Keryoil stretched his upper body out over the cart and grabbed hold of Hyurumi – – and bowing his head, he apologized.

“God fucking dammit, let go of me! Hakkon, Hakko-n!” (Hyurumi)

“Come back again.” (Hakkon)

Towards their receding backs, I let loose words of parting, putting on a front.

For Ramis to have only lost consciousness in this misfortune, I think we were probably lucky. If it was her, she would probably have jumped from the cart and remained behind with me.

With this, everything was decided. I can't fight as a vending machine, but I should be able to act as a decoy at least!

Form change!

My body stretched out straight forward, reaching three meters. I changed my body to a color that really stands out, and lined up cola as my only product. This vending machine was a big vending machine installed at a certain theme park, a thing where if you don't come with two people, with one of them acting as a step stool, you wouldn't be able to reach to purchase anything.

The giant, eight-legged alligator drawing closer had its eyes on the boar cart, but when all of a sudden an eye-catching, large thing appeared, its interest was stolen away. All four of its eyes are resting on me. In order to further attract its attention over here, I set my recording sound to the maximum volume.

"Welcome. Welcome. Welcome. Welcome." (Hakkon)

With my loud voice echoing all over, the eight-legged alligator reacted. It's glare filled with bloodlust stabbed into my iron body. *Oo*, it's scary. What will I do if my products freeze over?

As it closed in, my field of vision was dyed in the color of the eight-legged alligator's skin. It's a black lightly flecked with green, a speckled like color that buried my field of vision. This wetland specialist blows through the mud; it will probably reach me in a few tens of seconds.

I can wager on the <Barrier> that withstood the cave-in of debris, but if it pierces through the Barrier, it will be over in an instant. To add to that, I raised Endurance from 100 to 200, and Defense from 30 to 50.

10,000 and 9,000 points were spent, but it might be a pointless struggle, *na*.¹

I stare at the way-too-big leg that is approaching right before my eyes; the me who has given up on close observations was – – ignoring gravity, blown backwards.

《Points have been decreased by 1,000.》

Uoooo-, that sensation like being pulled over to the back, that was this guy sending me flying with a kick, huh? I'm a vending machine but I flew through the sky ... wait, this ain't the time to be thinking that!

I was blown through the sky several tens of meters, and crashing into a large rock stopped my movement. Thanks to Barrier there's no damage, but what's with the 1,000 point reduction? Wasn't Barrier 1 point consumption for every second? Even that time when it blocked out all the rubble it didn't show this kind of thing.

So when <Barrier> takes a stupidly strong attack that surpasses its strength, by consuming a large amount of points, Barrier can preserve itself one way or another. The rock has a Barrier-shaped dent. If I took that attack as something with flesh and blood, I'd vanish without a scrap of evidence remaining.

More and more, it's losing interest in chasing after Ramis and the others.

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1. Literally, like pouring water on a hot stone. It means, it might be a useless action.

CHAPTER 36

THE FIGHTING VENDING MACHINE

For buying time, with <Barrier> repelling its attacks like this, if it's just enduring, I might be able to hold out some how, but if this goes on and it heads towards the community, I don't know whether the Hunter Association's fortress walls can hold up to this.

At the very least, whether each and every person would be saved like the previous time is doubtful.

The always helpful inn's Okami-san and Munami. My most regular customers, the gatekeepers Karios and Gols. The three morning regulars, no, with the granddaughter who's joined them recently, it's four. The contraceptive buying Shirley. The blonde ojou-sama and her black-clothed shadow, the two money-changers, and so many other customers are all in that community.

If there's a vending machine there, it's said that it's a sign that the public order is peaceful.

Then, for a vending machine me that's here to protect each and every one of them, there should be no complaints!

I wonder if he's getting irritated that, no matter how many times he sends me flying I'm unbroken; the eight-legged alligator strikes out at me with a speed that he hadn't shown until now.

Even if I protect against this, if I'm sent flying a ridiculous distance away out of sight, there's also the possibility of this opponent losing its interest in me. If that happens, Ramis and the others that ran away will be exposed to danger. If that's the case, how about this!

It's something I found in the countryside; I change into a hand-made lunchbox vending machine. And then, I drop down a large amount of kara'age lunchboxes. Because of the rough handling, the contents had spilled out of the lunchboxes, and since they were warm from being heated up, the smell of kara'age wafted out.

I don't know whether an alligator's sense of smell is sharp or not, but if it's that big, it's probably always hungry. And as a bonus, it should be getting irritated that no matter how many times it attacked, I wouldn't break.

In this situation, right in front of its eyes, this thing starts to give off a delicious smell; what do you think it will do?

The answer to that is given by the alligator's mouth lined with sharp teeth.

I was shaken from left to right I don't know how many times, and now I'm falling head over heels. My surroundings are a reddish-brown, long tube thing. So this is the esophagus.

Even in this situation, I have <Barrier> protecting me. Like this, as I continued to tumble, there was a sound like falling into some liquid. **Bubble bubble** floating in the sticky liquid, I surveyed my surroundings; rocks and foliage and melted trees were submerged for who knows how long.

Aa, this is the stomach.

《Points were reduced by 10. Points were reduced by 10.》

The gastric juices are reducing my Points terribly. Looks like this situation doesn't give me much room for error. If this is the enemy's stomach, then – – let the harassment begin!

I made use of the boxed-goods function and switched the products. It was changed to the detergent vender found in coin-laundromats; I dropped it one after another, and using the abilities of <Barrier>, I marked the detergent as something that should not be inside.

The detergent that I put out was ejected outside of the Barrier, and **glub glub** sank in the gastric juices.

Saa, squirm in the palms of my hand. I'll treat you to as much as you want and wash your stomach clean!

As I dropped the detergent into its stomach one after another, the gastric juices began to heave. I can tell it's working and the eight-legged alligator is writhing in pain. Looks

to be pretty effective.

But you know, just this is probably not enough to kill it off. No matter how I think about it, this will only give it diarrhea and abdominal pains at best. If that's the case, this time I'll take something new, and change into an old-styled form.

Looking at it, I'm a rectangular box with a retro silver color; there is a lever attached, and it's possible to manually activate it. From the bottom part, orange tube stretched and connected to an old-styled gas burner.

This is rarely seen anywhere but old traditional inns, hospitals, and dormitories; a gas vending machine. Putting in 100 yen, you can use it for several minutes. I thought that this would be a convenient ability for cooking outside, but if it seems like the vending machine's products won't sell well, I can still pull my weight with this function.

There is only one reason I turned into the gas vending machine. I eject the gas outside the Barrier. The gas keeps **pan pan** going into the stomach.

Though there's "gas" accumulating in its stomach like it would if it ate too much, this here is ACTUAL gas that's accumulating. As gas continues to be emitted, the gastric juices begin to roil into whirlpools. My body is caught up in the flow, and is being gradually drawn into the center.

Does it intend to evacuate me outside its body? If I stay like this, I won't be able to do anything before being transported into its bowels. Is this enough gas, will <Barrier> be able to withstand it; unless I try it I won't know, but I can only trust that there's merit in just trying.

... The problem is fire. Using the burner's ignition is a good idea, but I don't have a method to turn the knob. I can operate the vending machine's body to some extent, but the burner seems to be treated as an external options, so no matter where I try to put in my power, it doesn't work.

This isn't what I expected. Not good; it won't be long before I get sucked in. Fire, sparks, whatever I can get is fine! –tte, is THAT possible?

I change into the vending machine mode to heat up frozen products, and inside the electric microwave contained within me, I tried placing a canned product. Usually

when I want to put something there I imagine it, and just one of what I wanted will appear there.

The vending machine is my body. It's something I've become acquainted with over many months. For this much, I'm begging you!

Inside my body, along with a *clang* sound, I felt the sensation of a small can appearing. Alri-ght, and now let's drop a towel and newspaper there.

This is something that's prohibited – – warming up a can in a microwave! Good kids better not try this at home!

While being afraid of the amazing sound I hear coming from inside me, I can feel the can giving off sparks. I shouldn't have the ability to feel anything, but I can definitely understand that something has occurred inside me.

A, here comes the fire.

《1 0 Damage; Endurance has been reduced by 10.》

I drop the canned beverage and the caught-on-fire towel and newspaper. And then, I prohibit these three things to be inside of the <Barrier>!

What was ejected from my retrieval opening is the firey towel and newspaper wrapped canned beverage. It's almost like watching a fireball being shot out.

The fireball ejected from the <Barrier>, the instant it went out and touched the stomach contents that were teeming with gas – – a huge explosion was induced.

"We look forward to seeing you again."

《Points were reduced by 1000.》

I can tell that there's reddish-brown something or other splattering past my eyes, but my field of vision was turning around and around, so I have absolutely no idea what happened.

Ooo-, it's like I'm drunk-!

With its stomach exploding, the pain must be unimaginable, I bet. Even if it's the level's eight-legged alligator ruler, it should eventually die ... is how it should be!?

My surroundings is a meat wall, a reddish-brown, sticky, glistening, fleshiness that's completely a meat wall surrounds me. It's acting violently as usual, and my body is being violently jolted; if I had a flesh and blood body, I bet I'd be vomiting.

I don't know how much time had passed, but finally the body's swaying has calmed. Did the eight-legged alligator die? If that's what happened, then the problem becomes, exactly what should I do to get myself out of its body?

《Points are reduced by 1. Points are reduced by 1.》

A, yeah, yeah, I know. I'm still maintaining <Barrier>, so my Points continue to be reduced. I feel that if I raise my Defense I might be able to withstand the pressure of this flesh, but I'll need courage to test that. With my points reduced so much, I don't really have the liberty to try and release this though.

If I defeated this, then I'm really satisfied. I may have used up quite a bit of my saved up Points, but it was in order to live. No, I'm a vending machine, so it was in order to continue operating.

I think I did pretty good this time. Although I'm praising myself, I think this act is pardonable. Even as a vending machine, I managed, didn't I?

Now I just have to wait until Ramis and the others who escaped come back; I'll have to endure for them to reach the community and gather a group to come subjugate this, I guess. Y'know, I'm really glad I don't have a sense of smell.

If they're fast it will be half a day; on the long side I'll have to endure for several weeks. I'm a vending machine, so waiting in the same spot is just another part of my job. Let's think about what kind of new products I should -- *Fua*-?

Are, the meat clumps that filled my vision have disappeared, and I can see the sky and ground.

E, this here is outside. The meat has all neatly disappeared. *E*, what the, I don't really know what's going on, so I'm going to keep <Barrier> up.

This is around the bog we were just in, I think. The crack in the ground is there, and there's golden light flowing out of it; Hyurumi called this phenomenon breaking the level.

Are, then I really got out? Looking around at my surroundings, there's long, white objects clustered together, positioned like they were covering me. These are the eight-legged alligator's bones ... I think.

So the flesh disappeared and only the bones remained. This is just what happens when you defeat the level's Ruler, I guess. With the light flooding from the crack shining on it, this specimen of an alligator skeletons looks a little mysterious.

Somehow I'm feeling relieved, but I wonder if someone won't come and set me upright. Right now, because I'm lying on my side, I'm a little uncomfortable. I can't set myself back right-side up; at times like this I can really feel the inconveniences of this body. Standing as a vending machine.¹

-tte are, the light from the crack was too dazzling so I didn't realize, but in front of my eyes, a gold coin is falling down. It isn't the usual gold coin, *na*. From what I can see, the designs are completely different. On the surface is a finely detailed carving of the eight-legged alligator.

If this was a game, then this would be the so-called Boss Drop, I guess. It's an item that only drops from the boss so it looks like it has some value, but I don't have any arms or legs so I can't take it!

Since it's inside the Barrier, no one will be able to steal it. Hyurumi will probably know the details about this. Until then, I won't let anyone take it.

Now then, looks like I've been released from that lump of meat, so now, I can't really do anything but laze around and wait for someone to come by.

U-n, somehow the ground is still continuing to vibrate even now; this crumbling sound that I can hear through the ground is kind of bothering me, but I'm sure I'm imagining things.

U—n, the crack in the ground seems to be spreading out from there, almost like a mesh net even, and the light intensity is filling my entire vision with golden, but that's probably just me seeing things.

U—n, this feeling like the ground I'm lying on is gradually sinking is — This is, it's caving in!

E-, did this turmoil break down the ground? Or is it just like the thing called breaking the level, it's actually going to break through the level!? Ha, hang on a minute. If that happens, after the ground breaks, then what happens? *E-*, falling?

This is no joke, it's seriously bad. —tte, I remember having the same thoughts before.

Hang on, someone, is there some person around with super-human strength-!?

Is there some customer with super-human strength that can easily carry a vending machine-!?

"Welcome. Welcome. Welcome."

I try calling out repetitively, but it only echoes through the uninhabited wetlands.

It's times like these that I understand the blessing called Ramis. I was riding on the thrill of defeating a tough opponent, but in the end a vending machine is a vending machine. It can't do anything on its own.

A-.

The ground that was support my body is gone; the vending machine falls, tumbling head over heels.

In this desperate situation, what floated up in my mind was Ramis' tear-stained face.

-
1. not sure if the pun is intended, but 'from the viewpoint of a vending machine,' versus 'to stand as a vending machine'. Anyway, I played it safe and translated kind of ambiguously.

CHAPTER 37

FALLING

The ground split and crumbled.

Together with the earth, I'm in the middle of a nosedive. Looking upwards I see a ceiling of earth; up there, holes are opening up everywhere. Those holes aren't that big, so even though I fell, the eight-legged alligator's bones cover up the holes from above, and so it seems they were spared from free-falling.

And then, turning my eyes below, there are clouds. Because I have Barrier affixed to me, there's no feeling of air pressure, but ... I can understand that I'm falling at a tremendous speed!

Eeeeeee-, once you fall out of the ground there's a sky, it's fantasy alright!

Uooooo-, we're so high you can't see the ground, eeee-, aaa-, c,c, calm down!

First I should figure out the present circumstance. You need to understand your own situation!

The place is, in the middle of the clouds!

The situation is, in the middle of falling!

The result is, destruction by crashing!

So this is the end ... it's like I'm giving up completely. Before I crash into the ground, I still have time. Let's put my head to work. To find a way to break through this situation of complete despair.

The only thing I can do is change my functions. If I apply all my vending machine abilities at full power, somehow, somehow, I'll pull through?

For a free-fall, reducing the falling speed would be good. In that case, the most suitable vending machine for this is. This one-!

I pick out the <Balloon Vending Machine> from out of my functions, and change my body.

Previously they used to be put out a lot on the rooftop squares of department stores

and in playgrounds, but now it seems that they're only put in old-feeling game centers, about.

It's a yellow body for the base with a glass window; In front if it is uninflated balloons hanging limply there. To buy, select the color you want from among them, put in the coins, and then the balloon will automatically be inflated.

-wait, I don't got the time to give you an explanation! As for color, I don't care; if I don't mass-produce balloons-

After setting the balloons, gas starting flowing into them. The red balloons got steadily bigger – -tte, if it's like this, there's not enough time by a lot. Can't I make them more quickly? A way to raise the speed ... If I raise my Speed in the Status, would I be able to up my filling speed!?

Even if it's useless from the get-go, since I don't have the time, let's try it.

《Would you like to consume 10,000 Points to increase Speed by 10? 》

Yes, please!

There's a feeling like something entered my body. The speed the balloons are filling is ... O-, I can tell it's going faster just by looking. It's become about twice as fast as before. If that's the case, then I'll raise it even further.

《Would you like to consume 20,000 Points to raise Speed by 10?》

The price hike is pretty awful, *ne*. Dammit, you point bastard, you better watch yourself at night. You can't escape peril without some sacrifices; another 10 up.

It's like watching it in fast-forward; every two seconds, one balloon is completed. The finished balloons are stopped inside the barrier, so the barrier's interior is packed with balloons.

Breaking through the clouds, I can begin to see the landscape below, but ... what is it, that? A giant, complicated maze? Oh yeah, Ramis was talking about something about the levels. I think it was, below the Seiryu Lake level is a giant maze or something.

-tte, right now isn't the time for nostalgia. I'm gradually being shown exactly what it means that the Labyrinth is big. Maa, my fall speed basically has had no change, na.

There's no way that several tens of balloons will be able to hold up a several hundred kilo vending machine. I remember that back in the day, on a variety show, just for one adult human to float it took over two thousand balloons. That's why, from the beginning, it's not like I was thinking that balloons could hack it with this vending machine.

The labyrinth's walls are massive; that the height and scale are bizarre is something I can understand as I approach the ground. I don't have the time for typical plans. Then-
!

What I selected here is – a change into a cardboard vending machine!

Let me explain!

The cardboard vending machine was something popular in elementary school; it's a vending machine you put together made out of cardboard! You can actually put in a coin, select a product, and when you push the switch, the product will come dropping down!

By the way, as a vending machine maniac, I bought and made a cardboard vending machine set!

That's right, right now my body has been changed to cardboard. In other words, I've suddenly changed to a weight that those many balloons can support.

HAAaaa, I made it. Thanks to filling up the interior of barrier with balloons, the fall speed dropped sharply, and I leisurely drifted down.

When I spotted the cardboard vending machine on the list of functions, I never thought that I would have the opportunity to take it, but to think that it would show its prowess in saving my life. It's really an inexplicable thing, na.

Now that I've relieved the worries in my heart, I enjoy looking at the scenery below me.

The walls of the giant circular maze is gray, so most likely the material is rock-like. The

pathways drawn out are both curved and straight; it's quite complicated. I can see the entire thing, so let's take a picture with my internal security camera.

Because of my altitude, the exact size is unknown, but it seems like the size of the passages are, even on the narrow alleys, you could line up several of me side by side.

So there's a square-like area and a thing like a pond. I wonder how much the cost would be to make it on earth.

Like I said before, the level below the Seiryu Lake level should be the maze level. I think there's a proper name too, but Hyurumi always called it 'maze level' over and over that I don't remember the proper name.

This level is pretty troublesome and the nasty things are high, so they said Hunters have a prejudice against it. There are treasure chests that naturally come out, so it seems possible to get rich quick, but the enemies are strong and the traps are many. As a bonus, the path is a maze, so by proceeding along the bearing they thought best, it seems there weren't a few Hunters that died of starvation.

Looking at it from above, I think the awfulness of the complicated maze was accurately conveyed.

Oh, it looks like just a little more and I'll reach the ground. If I land like this on top of the path's wall, there wouldn't be anyone would buy from me like this, na. -tte, oo, the tops of the walls are at acute angles, so it's useless to try to climb them, huh?

Like this, it looks like I'll land in a large pathway near the wall. U-n, to be honest I don't really know what I should do, so I'll just continue like this and let nature take its course. If it continues like this, it looks like I'll touch down near the center of the maze.

The path's walls are even taller than I thought. It looks like they're over ten meters from the ground. The thickness is proportional, so the maze brought out walls similar to those of a five story multi-apartment.

Shakily descending, floating near the wall, somehow I managed a clean landing. Let's return to the usual vending machine.

Both the flooring and walls are stone, and there's no noticeable seam. There isn't anything like a light source on the wall, so when day turns to night, it seems like it will become dark suddenly.

The breadth of the path seems to be fifty meters about; to the left and right the long pathway stretches out. From the feeling I got while looking from above, I'm on a main pathway that runs directly to the dead center of the maze; if it's here, then the possibility of meeting Hunters would probably be high.

It's also a place that would make it easy for Ramis and the others when they come to meet me. It seems like a place I can stay for a while.

Usually, there probably aren't any curious existences that would come to help out a vending machine, but if it's Ramis she'll definitely come. Usually when the level breaks and you fall, whether you're a human or a vending machine, anyone would understand the futility.

Even so, Ramis is someone who will most definitely come, I feel.

The Bear President also owes me, and the Fools of Whimsy Brigade is also aiming for me, so I think they will actively participate in the search. At the least, it might end up that Ramis can only participate if she joins the Brigade, I bet, na.

If she's going to do anything reckless, Hyurumi should be there to stop her. Although I'm thinking that I want her to come help, on the other hand, I'm thinking I don't want her to do anything reckless. It's contradictory, I know, but these are my true feelings.

First of all, my first priority has to be thinking about how to extend my lifespan here. There's also the possibility of other Hunters coming by and saving me, na.

Alright, let's survey the surroundings. I've only looked around roughly; thoroughly observing and gaining information is a necessity to extending my lifespan.

Right now, the place I'm at is alongside the wall of a large passageway. The path spreads to the left and right of me, but the ends are too far away and I can't see. It stretches out directly, but along the way seem to be many side roads split off.

Right now I don't spot any monsters. Looking from above, I felt like there were quite a few large-sized monsters around, but I think there's nothing in this large passageway. This might be the maze's safe zone, na.

Now then, the thing that interests me the most has fallen in front of my eyes; the coin with the eight-legged alligator etched on them. It was kept on the inside of the Barrier, so when I fell like this, the coin was also taken along with me.

In front of my eyes is a coin that seem to be worth something but I don't have any hands I can use; what a dilemma. Like this, if some random person picked it up and carried it off, I would be so enraged that I'd heat up all my products and cause them to spoil, zo.

But no matter how much I wish for hands, for a vending machine it's not possible. *Haa*, anyway, in order to live as long as possible, let's check my abilities and points again. In the battle with the eight-legged alligator, I consumed a large amount of the money I lifted off those thieves, na.

Vending Machine Hakkon

Endurance: 200/200

Durability:50

Strength: 0

Speed: 20

Dexterity: 0

Magic: 0

PT: 1,020,698

Functions:

Refrigeration, Heat Insulation, Omni-directional Sight, Hot Water Dispenser, Cup Ramen Support Mode, 2 Liter Support Mode, Coating Change, Boxed Product Support, Vending Machine Security Camera, Rod-Shaped Candy Dispenser, Oxygen Vending Machine, Magazine Vending Machine, Natural Gas Vending Machine, Cardboard Vending Machine,

Divine Gift:

Barrier

Just with my Endurance and Durability like this, it probably won't be an easy matter for me to be broken. With Speed, I think the speed when dropping down products and heating things up will increase. Later on I think I'll have to experiment, na.

As for what else changed ... n-, is there a bug?

The Point indicator seems a little weird. One, ten, hundred, thousand, ten thousand, hundred ten-thousand *hiyaa*, one million -!?!¹

E, a, u. eeeee-!

Why are there more than one million? E, I don't remember doing anything criminal myself to get it, zo.

What's the meaning of this? Points are things that are exchanged from coins. I'm pretty sure the explanation said something similar. At that time a notice popped up when I had gotten some points from money. Let's check that again.

《It is also possible to convert 100 Yen to 1 Point.》

See, it's written that I can exchange money for points. But – it doesn't state that there aren't other ways to earn points.

Couldn't it be, points are originally something you earn from defeating enemies? In a game, it's the standard that after you defeat enemies, you get skill points. Maybe, changing money into points is a secondary method, and the original method to get your hands on points is to defeat enemies.

If that's the case, if this large amount of points is from defeating the eight-legged alligator, the level boss, then I can consent to it.

I see, so there are other ways to earn points than consuming money. I'd like to study it, but I think there won't be a second chance to defeat a monster. This time it all seemed to work out, but such a well-scripted scenario probably won't happen again.

As I thought, for a vending machine, earning money is the way to go.

A~nyway, now that I've confirmed the situation, it's fun spending time!

Now that I've gone over 1 million points, I can finally have the possibility of getting my hands on a new Divine Gift. To be honest, I thought one million was a stupid amount of

points I'd never get my hands on, but to think there was this other way.
Now then, let's carefully look over the Divine Gifts.

1. Maa, although technically it would have gone from ten thousand to one million, the intervals in Japanese count ten thousand as a denomination, so it's 100 (ten thousands), aka a million. ... Yes, I left it as 100 ten-thousands because I thought it was funny, like he wasn't expecting it to be 1 million at all.
2. That slight dig isn't really there in Japanese.
3. ... cough.

CHAPTER 38

A NEW POWER

From the Divine Gifts that required me to get 1 million points, the necessary abilities are, oh, right, first let's organize them.

The sword related and hand-to-hand combat ones, and all the ones I can't use because I don't have hands or feet to use them are out of the question.

For fire magic, water magic, and all those magic related abilities, I don't have mana, so they're excluded.

For the ones that are left, let's analyze them carefully on whether they're useful abilities for a vending machine. First of all is this one.

《Telekinesis》, or PK¹, you could say; it's the psychic power to be able to move something without touching it, na. Let's look at the description.

《It is possible to manipulate any body within a one meter radius around yourself. However, it is restricted by weight and is limited to products only.》

A radius of one meter is, maa, it's usable. Just that much is enough to make me grateful. However, why is it limited to products? But, if I have this ability, I'll have the possibility of teaching people how to use the products. This is a possible selection. Then, let's look at the next one.

《Telepathy》

《You can deliver your inner thoughts to any person within a one meter radius around yourself.》

This is actually the Divine Gift I've been aiming for the most. If I have this, then it's possible for Ramis and me to have a conversation. The radius is small, but even so, having the ability to make my intentions understood is huge.

《Instant Transition》

《It is possible to move anywhere within a one meter radius of yourself instantly.》

The average guy would call it teleportation. But I wonder why the effective radius is limited to one meter. But even if you say I can't move more than one meter, I would get my hands on a way to move around as a vending machine.

These three are strong contenders. However, that's only if they're abilities that work the way I imagine. Like Barrier, there's the possibility that these consume points to use.

If that's the case, then I'll have to consider the consumption too. If Ramis was here then I'd choose Telepathy without question. However, I'm a lone person – lone box, all himself in this maze. I hesitate to choose it in this situation.

Instant Transition as well, in this huge maze, even if I get the ability to move by one meter, I feel like it would be a pitiful endeavor. Even if there's the possibility of activating it repeatedly, and even if there's the possibility of moving in the air, there's no way there isn't a downside, so I'm suspicious.

It seems that Telekinesis is the number one Divine Gift for a vending machine, na. If I'm able to manipulate my products, then the things that I can do greatly increase in scope. This is the most suitable-ish one, but there's no need to get it all in a hurry. I can't waste 1 million points.

Come to think of it, with just this many points, can't I choose something from the Functions too? I thought that I probably wouldn't be able to take any Functions that cost over a 100 thousand, so I haven't looked for the most part.

Maa, I think I've pretty much decided on a Divine Gift, but let's take a look at the Functions – e, there's something like this?

《Vending Machine Rank Up》

What is this, these words that make a vending machine maniac's soul sway? No, wait. Rather than something like this, I've already decided that choosing a Divine Gift would be more efficient. M,maa, just a little, I'm just going to look at the description.

《Rather than a vending machine that only receives coins and cash as compensation,

it will be a machine that can accept goods and services without the aid of an assistant. Once you upgrade to become the defined item, you will be able to further take various option parts. »

What did you say ... in other words, there will be Functions that I couldn't choose before, and even the vending machine body itself will increase in variety? Things that I, as an item called a vending machine this entire time, am unable to choose.

If I become not a vending machine, if I become that item that was described, then I will have Functions that I can choose from that were restricted to that item.

I can't just not choose – – wait wait wait. Calm down, me. First, let's take a deep breath and be cool, be cool.

"Welcome! Welcome!"

Alright, I'm calm. First, since this is another world, and even more so on the Maze Level, to choose a Divine Gift to prolong my life, that would probably be the correct answer. That's right. I've understood that point.

But, but you know, I'm a vending machine. I'm someone whose love has grown after getting this body. Although the reason behind my reincarnation is still unknown. It would be unforgiveable to forget that I am a maniac who was reborn as a vending machine.

Do I want to be a vending machine that manipulate things with psychic powers, or do I want surpass a vending machine with various functions?

«The vending machine's Rank has increased to 2.»

Those words floated in my mind for just a second, my body overflowed with power ... is what definitely didn't happen; absolutely nothing changed. If there's a Rank 2, then you can probably increase Rank further. I'm kind of looking forward to it.

From within my body a fever is coming out; I think about it calmly. Could it be, that I've screwed up?

N, no, certainly becoming more powerful is also a convenient matter. But, I'm a

vending machine. I forgot that and got my priorities backwards. Before, every time something was an inconvenience, something or other was able to come along and I managed, na.

Un, un. No matter what I chose I'd end up compromising and making a mistake, but at least my mistake was made because I chose while thinking about the future, so I have little regret.

Reflection time is over!

Immediately, let's get our hands on a Function I can use now that I'm Rank 2.

The white, slender and long body with the coin drop opening is obvious, but there's plastic hose part that's parallel to my side that's come out.

Furthermore, there's a trigger like on a gun there; when I pull it, **guuu** a good, heavy sound rang out and it sucked in air. There's also a switch next to the trigger; when I push that, a fierce wind can be blown out; it's a superior item.

It looks like it starts up properly, na -- the coin-operated vacuum left at self-service car washes.

I just explained it, but out of all the coin-operated vacuums, this is the model is the one I like best; it doesn't just suck but also has the ability to blow air so you can go under your seats and blow out all the dust.

The problem is this. My intentions are to see if I can freely use the suction and blowing at will in order to manipulate it. If it's possible, then I can shoot the tip of the hose outside of the Barrier.

If I can shoot the tip of the hose outside of the barrier, then I can stop myself from tumbling around on the ground. This vacuum hose is a light two meters plus, so it's possible to shoot it out.

And then, now I'll blow out air, STOP!

Just a little bit, the gust should be stronger ... whoops, this time it's too strong. Just a bit more, with the wind in short bursts, and I can fine-tune the position.

And the result of over ten minutes of struggles, somehow or other, I've transported the tip of the hose to my ideal spot. That's right, to near where the eight-legged

alligator coin is.

Before someone else takes it, it's better to have a way to take it in myself. Having reached that conclusion, I carried out my mission.

Hose in position, OK! No hindrances in sight! Begin the suction!

From the mouth of the vacuum a noise resounded, and the sand and dirt all together were sucked in at once. The main aim, the coin, is also unable to withstand the suction, so it sidled up to the mouth of the vacuum and disappeared inside of it.

Mission complete.

I can tell the coin is bouncing around in the hose. Oh yeah, after this, I wonder what will happen to the coin. I'm pretty sure this vacuum ejects out back, where there's a garbage bin installed and there is where the trash should fall into.

《The Coin of the Eight-Legged Alligator has been added to your Possessions.》

What? E, Possessions you say? There shouldn't be that kind of thing, na.
If there's an issue, act on it immediately. Let's check out my abilities.

Vending Machine Hakkon Rank 2

Endurance: 200/200

Durability:50

Strength: 0

Speed: 20

Dexterity: 0

Magic: 0

PT: 18,595

Functions:

Refrigeration, Heat Insulation, Omni-directional Sight, Hot Water Dispenser, Cup Ramen Support Mode, 2 Liter Support Mode, Coating Change, Boxed Product Support, Vending Machine Security Camera, Rod-Shaped Candy Dispenser, Oxygen Vending Machine, Magazine Vending Machine, Natural Gas Vending Machine, Cardboard Vending Machine, Coin-Operated Vacuum

Divine Gift:

Barrier

Possessions:

The Coin of the Eight-Legged Alligator

Oo, Possessions has been added to my status. That my Points have completely been reduced, and that Rank 2 is written there, there are other things I'm interested in, but first is the Possessions check, na.

《The Coin of the Eight-Legged Alligator. Proof that you have defeated a Level Ruler.》

That's it-!?

E, there's no other explanation? Is this just some collector's item? Or is it some coin that holds some important meaning? I don't really understand, but it probably won't hurt me to keep it.

.... I wonder if I can take the coin out. Even if I take it out, it will take time to suck it back up again, so I won't do it now. That Level Ruler's name is actually Eight-Legged Alligator, huh?

The points have been cut down to around 20,000, so it wasn't too unreasonable. The coin-operated vacuum actually consumed 2000 points. Of the Functions I'm able to choose from now that I'm Rank 2, there are a considerable amount of expensive ones; I didn't notice.

Because I did the things I had to do, I've quieted down a lot. Maa, because of that, the current situation becomes more real and pressing. I'm in one of the Level's most findable spots, so I estimate that the chances of running into Hunters who come to capture the Level are high.

From there the problem becomes what Ramis and any other resident of Seiryu Lake Level with good sense will do. And then, if thieves or the like come, it wouldn't be weird if I was broken or carried off. There also aren't any customers to secure anywhere here.

I should take into account the worst case scenarios. First I should secure the Points that are to be used only to preserve Barrier. And then, if I can find another method to get Points, that would be good. I can also suspend Functions to preserve points, so I'm not too worried.

That said, subjugating monsters ... is impossible, na. Defeating the Eight-Legged Alligator was just good luck. Even if you say do this or that again, I don't really want to, yup.

If anything happens and just suspending my Functions is enough, I have enough to withstand a year, but you never know what's going to happen in this other world. Or like, why did I sink 1 million Points into a Rank Up; if I think about it, I'll lose.

《The vending machine's form-change time has gone over the two hour time limit. Immediately return to the original vending machine. I repeat. The vending machine's form-change time has gone over the two hour time limit. Immediately return -》

What the!? All of a sudden a warning reverberated inside my head, and those words showed up. Form change time limit? E-, th, thinking about will have to take place later; returning back to the usual vending machine should be fine, na.

Immediately doing so, I returned to the usual vending machine, and the alarm and words disappeared. I've never experienced this before, but other than the original vending machine form, the most I've spent in another form on any day has never gone over two hours, huh?

Up until now I've turned into many forms, but come to think of it, I'd always feel kind of uncomfortable in other forms so I'd change back into the usual vending machine. So I've never gone over two hours in another model ... I didn't realize.

Two hours in one day is the limit, huh? It would be better if I stopped using a different form without a good reason.

Adding this into the mix, recently I've been relying on Ramis and Hyurumi all the time. A vending machine should be a convenient machine able to sell anything without a sale assistant. This is a good opportunity. Let's see how far I can make it on my own.

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1. Actually, the name of the ability is <Nen Douryoku> and he explains it by calling it telekinesis, but since Nen Douryoku is 'telekinesis' in Japanese, I switched it about a bit. PK is psychokinesis, another descriptor of telekinesis. I was going to call it "Mind Power, but telepathy was the next ability, so I opted to keep them similarly translated.

CHAPTER 39

A NEW MEETING

Haaa, the weather's great today.

While basking in the sunlight flooding from the sky, I'm living the laidback life.

Three days have passed since then, but not a single person has dropped by. But I don't have a single bit of impatience. Because just basking in the sun is happiness enough.

If it was the time before now, since my Points would be slowly but steadily reducing, I don't doubt that I'd be living in mild dread. But now my Points are increasing.

The reason for this is that on top of my head. A new Function and addition of a slightly slanted roof with a solar panel attached. With this, on sunny days I'll store up Points without doing anything.

See, choosing to rank up was the correct choice! –tte, there's nobody around, so why am I trying to justify it?

It seems this solar panel was originally intended to conserve energy and for times of emergencies. For me it's quite efficient; if the weather is good, I can gather 10 Points every hour. If I can earn Points from the sky, then I have more than enough to survive.

Within these three days, thanks to be re-checking my abilities, first I devoted my time to investigating that two hour transformation limit. The thing I knew is that if it's the form I had when I was reincarnated, I can stay in it no matter how many hours pass. The thing that I came know is, to sum it up, by leaving my outer appearance like this, if I only change the Functions inside, then there's no time limit.

To sum it up, even if I use the half cup ramen selling Function, it won't trigger the time limit.

If there's nothing pressing, like this I can just quietly pass the time, but. U,u-n, with one worry settled, now it's desire that surfaces.

To be honest, I'm bored. I'm not sure if it's because I got so used to the vending machine body, but if I don't sell something to someone, I can't calm down.

The Maze Level really isn't popular. I should have asked Hyurumi to tell me a little more about the details, but it's too late for that. And it's not like I had a method to ask her.

Ramis lost consciousness, but she's probably ok. The Obaa-san regular is there, so she can heal the wounds; there probably won't be any after effects.

Haa, recently I've been passing every single day in busy-ness, so days where I don't meet anyone all throughout the day are a little lonely. In front and in back are gigantic walls and you can see the sky, but that's it.

There's nothing to do, so like always I'm surveying my surroundings when, in the direction of the faraway passage, I catch a glimpse of something moving.

Replaying the recording I took from the sky with the security camera, I'm pretty sure that to my left is the entrance of the maze. So that means, I can have some high expectations, probably. It would be the best if it was help that came from the level above, but I don't care if it's other Hunters.

It would be nice if it wasn't a group with bad behavior, though.

Something is gradually getting bigger; I can just barely make out that shape.

Walking on two feet, that's a – small black bear ... no wait, cat, tanuki^{raccoon} dog? It has a face that's difficult to distinguish.

There are four of them. They're all matching, wearing vivid green leather jackets, na. Although they're not wearing pants, they're wearing shoes, huh? Above the neckline of the jacket, the pit of the throat can be seen, but there's a white crescent moon mark. A small asiatic black bear?

They're probably in the same category as the Bear President. But man, they're small.

The face and pelt are all completely black, but the inside of the black nose and the ears standing up are pink. There's also whiskers so it looks like a cat. So that means it's not a bear? Maa, whichever the case, it's cute the adorable face. For me, whose love for

cats is only second to my love for vending machines, I'm a little restless.

Wh,what is this, this adorable little troupe? I really want to be able to look more closely at them in the time span it takes them to select and purchase a product, but it seems that I'm not their concern right now. Burdened with backpacks on their backs, they're earnestly running for their lives.

Right behind them are three monsters with slack bodies and pig faces swinging clubs and chasing them. Run, run bear-cats ... -tte, it's like I'm calling them pandas; well, whatever.

Though the ones chasing them have over three times their stature, their legs didn't lose in swiftness at all, but one of the bear-cats legs seems to be hurt; since it's running while hanging on the shoulders of another, the distance between them and their chasers isn't widening in the slightest.

The monsters with the pig faces are, I'm pretty sure they should be the ones called the yutabutama. When the people on the Seiryu Lake Level make fun of fat people, I heard them mention it then.

There's still some distance between me and them, but please manage to get away from them somehow before you reach me. If you do, I'll be able to see if I can do something.

"Buaaaaa-!"

"Go awaaaaay"

"Leave me behind!"

"There's no way we're going to leave you -!"

Completely contrary to their impressions, their hoarse voices and their faces when their large mouths are open are freaking scary-!

Their mouths largely split their faces, and there's sharp fangs peeking out.

The one that's injured is an individual with droopy ears like a scottish fold cat. From

her voice, it seems like she's a female. As for the one she's hanging on, it's blackish-brown and, compared to the others, it's a tall bear-cat.

The one who was trying to intimidate while running is slender. The one running at the very back is plump and fluffy.

Even though they seem to be the same types of creatures, they're quite different when you look at them. Maa, just like that, come here, come here; if they keep it up like that, looks like they'll make it past me somehow. The distance between them and the yutabutama in the back are about ten meters, huh?

The question is, exactly how am I going to help out the bear-cats? It seems it's time to show off the method I thought of, while bored to tears, for a vending machine to attack.

I changed into a type of vending machine that doesn't have a flap on the product-retrieval opening and dropped a number of glass-bottled beverages. I changed the color of the vending machine to match the surrounding walls and assimilated to the wall.

At a quick glance, I probably just look like another part of the wall. In this situation, they probably don't really have the opportunity to look carefully anyway, na.

The bear-cats made it past, and shortly behind them, when the yutabutama draw close to in front of me – – Bottled Juice Splash!

With <Barrier>, I ejected the bottled juice outside of the barrier. As it is, the bottled beverages with some speed behind them made direct hits on two of the three pigmen. It seems like it totally didn't do any damage, but both the bottles that missed and the ones that hit are scattered all around, so my opponents stop their feet and observe me. Well then, I'll release my camouflage and play "Congratulations. You have won another bottle," over and over.

"What's this, oink."

"Maze's trap, **grunt**."

These guys have "oink" attached to the end of their words; it's easy to understand. So these monsters have some intelligence to be able to talk, huh? The Bear President and

these bear-cats seem similar; the mammals that walk on two legs might have high intelligence.

“Was there a trap here, oink?”

In the time that the yutabutama are analyzing me, the bear-cats have gained quite a bit of distance. And here I invoke a trap. I’m pretty sure pigs are omnivorous. I’ve heard that they eat anything.

I change into the vegetable selling vending machine that I’ve used a lot recently, uncovered the glass lids on the vegetable bins, and ejected them all outside with <Barrier>.

“Oink, food came out, **grunt**!”

“It’s food, it’s food, oink!”

Without a spec of suspicion, they crunched down like that and ate. Seems like they were quite hungry.

Carefreely turning their backs towards me, they’re greedily eating. Completely losing interest in the bear-cats, they single-mindedly picked up the scattered vegetables and tossed them into their mouths.

During that time, I changed into a vending machine with a short height that’s often placed at children’s themeparks and returned my coloration to match the walls.

After watching for some time, they ate up everything and were satisfied; smacking their bellies, the yutabutama sluggishly stood.

“So full, oink.”

“Oi, the box that shoots vegetables is gone, oink.”

They turned and looked this way and that, but even if they looked at me, right in front of them and the same color as the wall, they didn’t realize it.

They tilted their heads, but since it seems that their observational skills had dulled with their swollen stomachs, they left like that and returned from where they came.

I somehow managed to let the bear-cats escape, but that means that they left too. Dammit, I wanted to admire them more. But I'm satisfied with saving them so, maa, it's all good.

But man, those bear-cats were so cute. They were about the size of small children. But I wonder what those bear-cats were trying to do, coming here. If they were a monster that lived in the maze, I felt fear rather than murderous intent.

It seems that they're mutually hostile to those yutabutama. They're like the Bear President in that they seem that they'd live alongside humans well. It seems like we can understand each others' words, so they seem like they'd be great customers. How unfortunate.

But you know, even though here is a different world, the beastkins and monsters all resembled creatures from earth somehow or other, but I wonder what those bear-cats were. Just where have I heard of them, I feel like, somewhere a long time ago when I was young I might have seen them but ... what were they called?

I feel like it's a name that was really nerdy. When I was in middle school the name caught my eye ...

"Did they really go back ..."

"When we continue inwards, the monsters get stronger ..."

"They might still be alive in a trap..."

Oo-, I can hear the voices of those bear-cats from earlier.

Cautious of the direction the yutabutama went off in the entire time, without noticing, they came closer and closer.

Their lines of vision flickering all over while being wary of their surrounds, the four bear-cats came walking over.

Now then, what should I do? With me looking like the wall like this, there's a chance they won't realize I'm here, so let's return to the colors of the usual vending machine. The size is fine just to leave it for children's use. For the bear-cats' stature, this way would make it easier for them to use.

Aa, their legs and arms are so short and, whoa, calm down.

"What's that?"

"I wonder."

"It might be the trap that caught the yutabutama from earlier."

The hurt one with the floppy ears stared fixedly at me from a distance. The fluffily plump bear-cat also readied himself in the rear. The other two seem to be deeply interested, and with soft steps they crept closer and *hyu~* stretched out their forelegs, I mean hands, poking me.

It doesn't hurt at all; I think they just wanted to see what I would do. Really, their cat-ish qualities aren't limited to appearance but also a vigorous inquisitiveness. They surrounded me and *sniff sniff*, sniffed me with their noses.

A, I am currently exceedingly happy. Like this, blissfully surrounded by bear-cats, I'd like to pass my time happily, but that won't do either. How unfortunate.

"Welcome."

"Buooooo-!?"

The bear-cats sprang back all at once and took some distance. Like I said, that cry and those faces are scary. That was my bad; I scared them.

"Buaaaaa-!"

The blackish-brown one aggressively opened his mouth wide and tried to intimidate. The other two slowly backed away. Like this, they're going to run away. Here I did a form change, heated up some kara'age, and dropped it down. My speed had increased,

so in the blink of an eye it was all heated up.

“It lit up and stretched out!”

“E, everyone, be on alert-!”

“Isn’t it better to run? *Nee*, isn’t it better to run?”

The three in the back became further panicked.

The slender one is probably the leader; he urged his comrades to be cautious. The plump cowardly one was the furthest in the back, and fell further back.

Dammit, their frightened behavior is also too damn cute.

“E-, this smell is meat?”

The blackish-brown one noticed the smell and his nose twitched.

When you’re talking about cats, you usually think about fish, but actually they like poultry more than fish. The cat I used to keep, whether its raw poultry or pillaging kara’age, it ate it all. Maa, if that’s a bear, then meat would be its favorite.

He’s wary against it being a trap, but his inquisitiveness and appetite keeps him from moving away.

“Welcome. Please insert the coins.”

“Buaaaaa – ...a? This is, is this a box that sells stuff?”

O, the droopy-eared one realized it.

“Suko, don’t be tricked. It’s a trap that uses things to lure you in, I bet.”

The thin one really is cautious. Even though the hot and tender smell is drawing him unsteadily in.

“Pel, you can’t get close. Shote too, take some distance.”

“Got it, Mikene.”

O, all the bear-cats that have made an appearance have had their names established. The slender leader’s name is Mikene, the droopy-eared female-like one is Suko. The plump one is Pel, and the blackish-brown aggressive-looking one is Shote. I have to lead the bear-cats to buy my products somehow.

CHAPTER 40

DEMONS OF GLUTTONY

Their vigilance hasn't waned, but it looks like they're interested in the kara'age. If I offered everything for free, if they try to get at my contents for products they desire without purchasing, that would also be troublesome.

"Mou, let's try and eat it. We don't food anymore; my stomach's all empty."

Alright; the bear-cat called Pel has given into the temptation. Just as he appears, he's the gluttonous character.

"You idiot, Pel. Even if we're called Demonic Big Eaters, you can't forget your pride as a fukuro-kuma-neko-ma."

(pouch-bear-cat-ma)

Said Mikene. It's fine that he's sticking his chest out like all leader-like, but what the heck is a Demonic Big Eater? And that fukuro-kuma-neko-ma is a long name.

Judging from the name, it means they're marsupials with the traits of bears and cats. And then the Demonic Big Eater ... AAA-! I remember what animal they're based on! Since the name was so cool, I took notice when I was in middle school when they became endangered animals. It's probably, the Tasmanian Devil!

Even though they have a cute face at first glance they have a demonic cry, and in the pit of their breast is a white crescent moon design. I remember now; there's no doubt they're Tasmanian Devils. Because this is another world, I thought it might be something more outrageous, but the haziness has finally completely cleared up.

Tasmanian Devils are known for being quite the gluttons for meat food. If I can convert them to being customers, it looks like I have some expectations for profits.

"Welcome. Please insert the coins."

“Should we run or ...”

“Mou, I can’t stand it anymooooooooore”

Pel pushed Mikene aside and jumped at the box the kara’age were in. And then, unaware of the surroundings he tore open the box, and with the steaming scent rising from the kara’age inside, he stabbed the kara’age with his sharp claws and tossed it into his mouth.

“**Hafu, hafu* *gulp*, s,so gooooooooood! What is this!?”*

In the blink of an eye, he put away all five pieces of kara’age; he licked away the oil around his mouth with his tongue.

“Eh, it’s good? Eh, so if you put in coins, you’ll buy the thing same thing that’s on the picture, huh?”

“O,oi, what about us! It’d be better to break the box ... no, here is where you put coins, and then afterwards we can break it to get it back. I want to eat too.”

“Hang on, Suko, Shote! This might be a trap –“

Ignoring Mikene trying to stop them, the blackish-brown Shote took a silver coin out of his jacket pocket, somehow spotting the coin slot, and tossed it in there.

“The part that sticks out under the picture is glittering. So I should push this, huh?”

If he were someone from the community, I’d reply with “Welcome”, but with these guys, the meaning that it means “Yes” won’t be conveyed. When it came to everyday life in the community, that kind of exchange became the usual, so I became negligent. Originally, it obviously should have this kind of inability to communicate like now.

“So it really was like that. What an amazingly fragrant smell that whets your appetite. And it’s hot too. I’m also going to eat.”

“Then, me too.”

Other than Mikene, they bought kara'age and ate it with relish while going **hafu hafu**. Pel took out numerous silver coins and inserted the coins into the slot one after another, then rapid-pushed the kara'age switch.

I'm really glad I raised my speed. At this rate, if they had to wait for it to heat up, they might run out of patience and might break me with their vigorous force.

In all he bought six kara'age, and after Shote and Suko who were waiting behind him, similarly made their purchases.

Even Mikene, who had crossed his arms and was staring over here, somehow he seemed to have reached the limits of his patience, and **fura fura** walked unsteadily up to my front and put in a silver coin; he bought kara'age.

"Good grief, if it was actually a trap, what were you guys going to do? First, I guess I should check for poison ... Haaa-, the meat juices just spill out! What is this, it's way too delicious!"

Yosh, all members have surrendered. So they realized the art of Japan's frozen food goods, huh? -tte, I shouldn't be acting like it's my own personal achievements. Thank you, unnamed company!

Personally, I like the fried rice from this maker, but there's the issue of whether these meat-eaters would eat it.

But the Bear President is omnivorous, so it might be ok not to worry about that point, na. If I think about it like that, it should be fine to view them more carefreely but ... these Tasmanian Devils, exactly when will they continue to eat? For each person's portion, they've already bought over 20 kara'age, though.

E, is their stomach going to be okay?

To think that just four animals, I mean four people would have done so well. Just from them, to think that I have to replenish the kara'age. Demonic Big Eaters are frightening.

"Mou, my tum-tum's full. I'm tired from running away..." (Pel: fluffily fat one)

“Hey, Pel. This isn’t a place for you to sleep.” (Mikene: slender leader)

“Mikene, isn’t it better to take a break here? Suko’s also at her limits for moving around, I bet.” (Shote: brownish-black tall aggressive one)

“I’m sorry. It doesn’t seem like I can walk any more.” (Suko: flop-ears female)

“No, I should be apologizing. Then, I’ll keep watch, so everyone rest up here.” (Mikene)

“Got it. I’ll switch with you later, so I’ll leave the first watch to you, Mikene.” (Shote)

Except for the leader-like, slender Mikene, they all crammed into the crevice between me and the wall as if to hide; not one minute after they went horizontal, they fell asleep. They must have been quite exhausted.

At this distance, I can probably somehow use <Barrier> to protect them.

Having seen this much, I can see that they all have a relationship of mutual trust and acceptance. The slender Mikene is standing, keeping watch, while leaning on me, his consciousness nodding off every once in a while. Even while standing he seems to be sleepy.

The surroundings are starting to get dark; it would be fine if you just fall asleep like this, you know? I’ll take your place and stand watch.

There was no way my feelings got across to him, but Mikene seemed to have used up all his strength and he slid to the ground; like that he fell asleep.

Good work today. Tonight, be at ease and fully rest up.

“So what do we do now, everyone?”

“gulp, chomp chomp, chew chew”

Mikene is trying to hold a discussion about what to do afterwards with his companions, but all members are absorbed in eating and not listening in the slightest. In the end, these guys, none of them woke up all morning, and when their eyes finally opened they seemed to have empty stomachs, so once again they mass-bought

kara'age.

In this situation his body transformed and his face became grim again as he tried to intimidate, but he quickly accepted the situation when he understood that kara'age could be bought. This race might be one that prioritizes food.

"But I wonder what this box is."

"*gulp*. Fuuu. Isn't it a magic tool you can buy food from?"

"Our luck was good, ne. To be able to eat such delicious meat."

"Pel's super relaxed, na. Even though we're in this situation."

I understood from eavesdropping on their discussion over breakfast; these guys seem to be Hunters, not monsters that live in the maze.

They belong to a certain brigade, and it seems the name of that group is <Demons of Gluttony Brigade> Somehow the name seems contrary to their appearance, but after watching them eat like that I can agree with it.

But man, in this world the Hunter groups are probably bound to having weird names attached to them.

This is only what I know from eavesdropping, but this Maze Level appears to have quite good profits, but the danger is high; Hunters who want stability seem to avoid it. So that's why I never met a Hunter.

These guys' Demons of Gluttony Brigade, according to themselves, have mysteriously high expenses; in order to improve the brigade, they were looking for get-rich-quick schemes, and so it seems they came to this level. Maa, that reason is ... from a third person's point of view you'd understand well but ... they probably won't be able to determine that it's their eating amount.

These guys' physical abilities are also high, their jaws are strong and their claws are sharp; furthermore they have the intimidation Divine Gift called <Roar>. They're not

lacking as Hunters in any way, but they have small bodies from birth so they're weak against big opponents.

Even so, according to what they said, against the yuta-buta-ma chasing them, if their comrade hadn't been injured and their opponents were only two, then they had the confidence that they could have repulsed them. I don't know if that's true or not, though.

These guys, who ate everything to exhaustion, rubbed their bellies and **bou** spaced out. With their bellies swollen and with the sense of crisis gone, they're relaxed, na.

"Everyone, we need to talk. Properly listen, please. It's about what we're going to do from now on, but I think we should absolutely return to the entrance."

"But, we haven't gotten our hands on any treasure, though?"

"I,I'm for going back, I guess. 'Cause, it's scary here."

"If we return now, then the continuation of the brigade will be impossible; are you ok with that?"

As long as you have your life is the fundamental thing to say, ne. To be honest, going back would be fine, probably.

The only female -- no, it would probably be better to say lady.¹ I would recommend coming back after you've healed the lady's wound.

"Everyone, if it's treasure, didn't we find it? A magic tool you can buy food from!"

"Aaaa-. There's that too!"

To be called treasure doesn't have that bad of a feeling to it, but I'm not anyone's belonging; I've decided on being Ramis' partner. I guess I'll raise an objection.

"Too bad."

"BUAAAA-! That scared me. So it can say things other than 'Welcome.'"

“Congratulations! You’ve won another bottle.”

“E-, can it say anything else...”

“Thank you. Please come again.”

I played back all the recordings I can see and gauge the others’ reactions.

As for the fukuro-kuma-neko-jinma, the bear-cats form a circle, facing each other, whispering and discussing with one another.

“Right now, didn’t it react to our voices?”

“I wonder if it isn’t a coincidence.”

“But, it had the timing of being a response.”

“No way, do you think this box has a consciousness? Let’s test it out.”

Once the discussion was over, all of them stood one step away and stared at me. I, if you look at me with those black eyes, I won’t be able to calm down.

Mikene acted as their representative and took a step forward and conveyed their thoughts.

“Could it be that you understand what we’re saying?”

I was waiting for that. Of course I’ve already decided on a response.

“Welcome.”

“A, as expected, it doesn’t understand. It looks like it just selects suitable words in response to our voices.”

E-? Nononono!

Now see here. I can’t say anything other than set words, and I’m doing the best I can to cope.

“Too bad.”

“A, it’s true. It’s just reacting, and it doesn’t seem like it has any meaning. A-, that startled me.”

“Un, un, it scared me so I’m hungry again. This time let’s try something other than the fried meat-“

Eeeee-! Come on, try investigating it a little more!

You might discover all sorts of things, so keep it up!

But maa, I cheer them on in my heart, but without regards to my feelings they start eating again.

Ha... aa, but, I see. If I calmly think about it, this would be the normal reaction.

Ramis’ high sensitivity helped so it was possible for the understanding in the community to be that I had a will, but these guys have the obvious reaction.

“Then, I guess it’s okay to return with this magic tool box.”

“Oka-y.” “Fine with me.”

The approval was unanimous. I really want to fix the misunderstanding, but it’s fine for now. If they’re going to transport me all the way to the vicinity of the entrance, then I’ll be grateful for THAT, na. In the case that Ramis and the others come looking for me, they’ll be able to find me immediately.

“Right, then since Suko is injured, then us three will carry it!”

Mikene, Pel, and Shote crowded around me and put all their power that seemed like it should move me, but I only moved maybe about one centimeter. Now that I’ve encountered this situation several times, I realize how great Ramis is to transport me by herself.

“Funuuuuuuu”

“Ugaaaa, BUAAAAA-!”

“N,no use...”

The three flopped against me together as they repeated their heavy breathing. They might have enormous strength comparative to their small statures, but it’s insufficient to carry me.

If I went with them there would be no need for them to secure food, in case of an emergency I can protect them <Barrier>. Besides that, I’m a little worried that they’ll throw me away, or rather, leave me behind.

That said, it would be better if I changed into a shape that’s easier for them to transport. If I was the cardboard vending machine then they could carry me easily, I bet. However, the transformation time limit is two hours. I should save it for an emergency.

The other method is this as expected. One of the additional functions from the rank up; an installation of four wheels on the bottom.

“Are, isn’t it kind of taller?”

“Look look, underneath the box wheels came out!”

So they realized. With this I think I can be moved, but is it going to be ok?

Once again, except for Suko, all of them flanked me and pushed; slowly, more than I thought, I smoothly began to move. Here the path is level, and I’m glad there are no inclines or declines.

“It moved, it moved!”

“This is gonna be big money!”

“We’ll be able to eat our fill all the time, na.”

“Just this itself is a handy magic tool. If we sell it to Chain Restaurant, then we’ll be raking in the dough.”

Sorry to break your happy mood, but I don’t have the intention to be sold. And, I absolutely refuse when it comes to Chain Restaurant.

U-n, if they meet up with Ramis and the others, there will most definitely be a dispute. It’s a worrisome situation, but right now I can get closer to the entrance, so let’s not think about it.

-
1. he uses mesu, which is a nomenclature for a female animal, and corrects himself by using josei, which is a female human.

CHAPTER 41

FOUR ANIMALS AND A MACHINE

Although adding wheels made it so I could be moved, there's quite some weight so it requires quite the physical strength; after pressing on for about an hour, they took a break.

Like that, they came to want drinks, so each of them chose a bottle.

Since it would be a problem for me if they run out of strength and willingness to continue, I offered the drinks cheaply, but it appears they don't need liquid to that extent. If you compare it to the amount of meat they eat, they don't drink any more than a normal amount.

With a number of breaks inserted, we progressed for the entire day, but it honestly doesn't feel like it. Looking up the path, the surrounding scenery pretty much doesn't change, so it's to the degree that I'm uneasy about whether we've actually made any progress or not.

Occasionally a divergent path will appear, but I've known how complicated it is since before. Since I have completely recorded the panoramic of the maze by photographing it with the security camera, after all.

As it became evening, these guys began to make camp preparations quite early. I've heard from the gatekeeper Karios that monsters become more vicious at night, so they're probably being cautious against that.

It was like this at noon, but at night I sold a massive amount of products as well. I've since gone past horror and reached admiration for their appetite. If they had an eating contest against the Fools of Whimsy Brigade's big eater, the archer Shui, it promises to be interesting.

"About how much longer until we reach the exit, na?" (Shote)

"Even on the fast side it would be about a week, right? Since it seems we've been in

the maze level for about two weeks.” (Suko)

“We were lost for quite a few days too, ne. I also think that’s about how long it will take.” (Pel)

“This big path is the main street so I don’t think we’ll get lost, but in exchange the encounter rate for monsters goes up. We need to be vigilant.” (Mikene)

I haven’t seen anything other than the yuta-buta-ma_(abundant-pig-demon), but it should be obvious that within the Maze Level, there are all sorts of monsters living in it. When I was looking from above, I felt there was giant, human-shaped rocks around. If this was your standard fantasy, then these would be the lifeforms born from mineral and rock by magic, the golems.

There was just too much distance below me, so even if I understood there was something there moving around, I wasn’t able to confirm the exact forms.

“If we go forward a little more, we’ll be at the yuta-buta-ma’s_(abundant-pig-demon) place, ne.” (Shote)

“Un, that’s right. They came flying out of the side-path so suddenly and I hurt my leg, so I remember it well!” (Suko)

“That time it scared me so bad, naa. Just remembering it is making me hungry.” (Pel)

“Try to restrain yourself for a little bit more, Pel.” (Mikene)

So it’s the area the yuta-buta-ma_(abundant-pig-demon) prowl around in. Suko’s leg has gotten largely better, so this time, even if they’re chased, they probably won’t have any problems with running away with all their might.

The Demons of Gluttony Brigade don’t know about my <Barrier>. I understand that it would be better to let them know, but I wonder if these guys will properly understand what I’m trying to say when I show them.

I’ve I make them screw up if I show them in the heat of things, then it would be better to show them now. Un, I’ve decided.

“Welcome.”

“BUAAAAA-!? Wh,why did the box say something all of a sudden-?”

Like always, when they're startled that face they make when they scream – no, they make that animal cry, has way too much impact and it's scary.

All members take notice of me. Then, I should go ahead and put it into action, huh?

“E-, e-, a blue-ish, transparent wall is.”

“Wh,what is going on? E,everyone, are you okay!?”

Mikene and Suko aren't covered; because they were a bit further away, they're on the outside of the barrier. The two who are covered, on realizing they were surrounded by the barrier, they wanted to go out in a panic, and are beating their heads against the barrier.

“I,I can't get out-! Mikene, Suko, heeeeelp!”

“Pel's completely freaked out. Calm down.”

On being trapped in, Pel panicked and raised a fuss, but Shote quickly calmed down.

“BUAAAAAA!”

Mikene and Suko opened their mouths wide and threatened, bringing their sharp claws down on the barrier.

But those claws weren't able to pierce the barrier, and were simply repelled.

“This is, if this box did this, then –“

This time, Shote opened his mouth wide and came biting at me. Shote is not authorized to be in the barrier!

Ejected outside in that pose of biting something, Shote scrabbled on the ground on all

fours and glared at me.

Unlike others, they're reacting completely belligerently. I thought they were just big-eating, cute creatures, but now I realize that they're quite the violent species.

"BUAAAAA-! What is the meaning of this, magic tool! Release my comrade!"

Mikene threatened me with a vicious expression. The name of "devil" isn't just for show.

This has kind of gone a different way than I expected, but in order to get rid of the misunderstanding, let's release Pel.

"I,I'm the only one who can't get out ... a, I'm out."

"You're safe, Pel. What the heck. This blue thing is ... and then, this magic tool did it?"

"Welcome."

I put out my usual saying in place of "yes".

"You messing with me-!? What the hell do you mean by 'welcome'?"

With his remaining anger, Shote bared his fangs and raised a growl.

So that's how you're going to take it. To say welcome or something in this kind of situation, I guess it can't be helped that they think I'm making fun of them. It's no good; I'm too used to the conversations I had with Ramis and the others.

If I want to communicate with these guys, I have to grope around for a different way.

That said, although I regret not choosing <Telepathy>, there's no point in regretting the past. With that, all I can do know is the very best I can with my capabilities.

I take the function that I was wavering about since awhile ago, <Electric Bulletin Board>. This consumes quite a bit of points, so it's a function I was always hesitating about. If it was perfect, then here I could write words and it would be possible to have a conversation with another person, but... Let's try it out and see how it actually

works.

A long, black board was installed at the top of where the products are lined up. And, I try to convey my intentions to the words that are streaming there.

[Welcome. Please insert the coins. Thank you very much. Please come again.]

As I thought, it's only my preset sayings-!

This was the biggest reason I was hesitating. I had a nasty suspicion that it would be restricted to my recording's set sayings. How should I say it; it met my expectations so splendidly, I want to cry.

"E, what is this. A weird picture, or a line? Is streaming by."

"Maybe, could it be words? Although I've never seen them before..."

A, un. And as a bonus, it's written in Japanese. No, well I knew. The words for 'can' and 'vending machine' wouldn't be understood, but for this to be the punchline!

I wagered it all on a thin strand of hope, but like this, I'm just streaming characters that the other people find mysterious. I guess I can't get a refund for my points, ne.

Aa, dammit, this is a problem. We're at a complete standoff. How should I do it, to get these guys to understand that I mean no harm, and that the barrier is a power that can protect them?

"I guess this means that the magic tool box is rejecting us."

"Too bad."

"Look, see."

No, you're wrong Mikene. Again, because I tried to say 'No', it came out of my mouth. This is SUPER frustrating. I want Ramis and Hyurumi.

"Let's not touch it; there's nothing we can do but leave him here."

“But Mikene. If we don’t bring it back with us, we won’t have money and we’ll starve to death.”

“Just like Pel said. Why don’t we try to figure out a way to bring it back with us.”

“Un, un, that’s true. Look, it only drove us away without hurting us.”

O, I can have some expectations again. Then, first let’s release Barrier. Then, it should be offering them some food, right? Alright, it’s your favorite kar’age~.

“Hauu, that meat smell.”

“Pel is really weak to that, na-“

“Even if you say that, Shote, you’re drooling, you know.”

“It could be a trap. First, I should do the poison-tasting-“

It’s like I was an idiot for worrying, how quickly they came back around. Lured in by the kara’age, they began buying it in large quantities again. With a firm grasp on their stomachs, I guess you can say that it was my win.

“*Hafu, hafu*. To be able to make such delicious food, there’s no way this box is a bad guy.”

“Un, that’s true. It’s this delicious, after all.”

“Maa, it’s delicious, so it’s fine, na.”

“Aa, because it’s delicious, na.”

Is that really fine with you guys? You’re not going to be a little more, like, cautious or hesitant?

That vigilant mode from before has been blown off somewhere, and throwing large

amounts of kara'age into their mouths, they chew in a very satisfied manner.

Seeing their blissful faces, well, whatever is fine. For now, I'll just match my actions with them; though it wasn't great, I've at least conveyed Barrier's existence to them. With just that, it was enough.

"Oooooink!"

This peaceful atmosphere is blown away; the cry of the yuta-buta-ma (abundant-pig-demon) reverberates around, and the sound **dotadota** of something striking the ground is coming. The sounds are coming from the entrance to a sidepath a little up aways.

"Right now was the yuta-buta-ma (abundant-pig-demon)! Everyone, get prepared to run!"

All members stood up at the same time and crouched. That's all their preparations are? A, this, this is the pattern of being left behind again. To prolong the lives of each and every one of the Demons of Gluttony, once again I'll buy them some time.

With those feelings I stare at the part of the path that connects to the sidepath; six yuta-buta-ma (abundant-pig-demon) come flying out. And, they're running this way. From their bodies sweat is flowing, and they even let go of their weapons, sprinting with all their might.

E, what the, they have pathetic expressions like they're going to break into tears right now. It's almost like, certainly, doesn't it seem like they're being chase-.

Like it was confirming my thoughts, behind the yuta-buta-ma (abundant-pig-demon) the air wavers; a giant skeletal hand appeared and grabbed onto the wall. It isn't just big; that hand is wrapped in fire; it's heat is so ferocious that the stone wall is melting, transforming into something like magma.

And then, appearing as well, about the size of a whole yuta-buta-ma (abundant-pig-demon), a gigantic skull came out. Like its arm, the fire the face was clad in was a black flame.

"That is, Honoo-kyo-hone-ma (Flame-big-bone-demon)-! You've got to be kidding-, everyone run-!"

CHAPTER 42

HONOO-KYOU-HONE-MA

(FLAME-BIG-BONE-DEMON)

There's not even the time I had when the Yuta-Buta-ma(surplus-pig-demon) were attacking the Demons of Gluttony Brigade; there's only enough time to flee. The Demons of Gluttony Brigade are already dashing away with lightning speed.

The flame-clad skeleton's full body as been revealed, but this is a hugeness on the level of shocking. It only needs a little bit more to reach the tops of the walls. It's in the area of ten meters, about.

The excessive heat is making my vision go wavy, na. At each step it takes, there's a melted footprint in the ground. And as a bonus, there's a terrible tremor up and down. With just that build and only being bones but having that heavy weight gives it the impression that it's not a small-fry. For it to be an oscillation that will make the vending machine float, it's quite the thing, *dazo*.

If it's this overwhelming, then I guess I won't be able to utilize the Cola Splash that I used against the King Kaeru-jin-ma (Frog-person-demon). If I sprayed water from inside a bottle, it really would be 'like pouring water on a hot stone', na.¹

I should give up on defeating it and think about how to buy time, huh? In just a little bit, the Yuta-Buta-ma (surplus-pig-demon) will reach me if they continue this way... in that case, I've decided on what I will do.

First is a form change, na. From the Rank 2 Functions column that materialized, I change to <Kerosene Measurement Tool>. That thing that's always there at the gasoline stands and helps a lot in winter.

A white body with the mark of a certain gasoline stand drawn on it; at the side there's a sturdy rubber hose with a lever-attached nozzle.

Right, with this, let's spray it all over the ground – – the tip of the nozzle is stuck in the main body, na. Like this, when I pull the lever, won't I become smeared with kerosene?

Maa, even if I got soaked in kerosene, it seems like if I don't allow it to be inside <Barrier>, even the kerosene sticking to me would be ejected out. To check it a little, let's try and let out just a bit of kerosene.

Pull the lever ... I see, for the sake of safety, when it's still stuck in, the kerosene won't come out. As expected of Japan. Alright, the plan's terminated!

Maa, I'm not a person – vending machine that has given up on valour, na. Isn't there some kind of loophole method? –tte, oo-.

Honnou-Kyo-Hone-ma (flame-big-bone-demon) took another step and shook the earth, and the body of me that has become a kerosene measuring tool left the ground. And at the same time as I landed, the nozzle got loose and fell to the ground.

This is quite lucky, zo. The tip is also in the perfect state, facing the passageway. Then, like this I can spray the floor with kerosene.

The kerosene that overflowed from the nozzle and went and soaked the ground. Because the ground here is also stone the kerosene, without soaking in, the entire area can accumulate the thin oil.

The Yuta-Buta-Ma (surplus-pig-demon) who are fleeing with frantic footsteps, completely without any caution, drew closer to the kerosene zone, and,

“BUHiiiiii!”

At that spot, without even taking a safe falling posture, they fell. They're even cradling their heads, groaning.

The kerosene-smeared floor, since I think it's about as slippery as a skating rink, the Yuta-Buta-Ma (surplus-pig-demon) who fell down once are also having a hard time getting up.

And here, the Honnou-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon)'s foot came stomping

down and – – the kerosene burst into flame in an instant; the surroundings became a sea of flames.

Of course with <Barrier>, I'm isolated from the heat and flames, but the fallen, completely covered in kerosene Yuta-Buta-Mas (surplus-pig-demons) splendidly went up in flames.

Without even being able to raise their death throes, the corpses of the Yuta-Buta-Ma (surplus-pig-demon) tumbled down; Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon) pinched them up, opened its skeletal mouth, and into that he threw them in.

So it's a skeleton's awful habit for a meal. Even though the flames turn everything it touches into cinders, I guess that's ok by it.

The appearance of the enormous skeleton blazing brightly within the sea of flames, eating burned corpses is, it's a solemn feeling that surpasses terror. This is because I'm inside the relatively safe area within the Barrier that I think like that; if I was flesh and blood, this would make my legs give out.²

Satisfied with the six bodies of the Yuta-Buta-Ma (surplus-pig-demon), Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon) merely glanced at me, without making even the smallest pass at me, and like that it went walking off.

Since I had changed to the same color as the walls did it not notice me, or was it because it had satisfied its stomach that it had not interest? Whichever the case, it doesn't change the fact that it saved me.

However, this is an awful situation. On the ground there's the caved-in imprints in the shape of the underside of the bone feet, and where it had approached the walls had been changed into warped impressions where it had melted and re-hardened.

I guess that's also a Level Ruler, huh? I didn't check whether or not that existed when I was surveying in the sky, but I bet there's some sort of condition for its appearance, na.

If THAT was wandering around like it owned the place, then the labyrinth would be in an even worse state of affairs so, like I thought, there is probably some sort of reason.

Now then, the problem is that I'm all alone again. But it feels like the Demons of Gluttony Brigade would return here when they get hungry. Whatever the case, their thought processes are way too rough, so even though it would be fine if they put the food in their backpacks, without thinking a thing they only eat, na.

After that, since the ground to continue has been caved in and melted and warped, it looks like it will be quite difficult to push the vending machine.

As expected, the opponent this time made even those thoughtlessly optimistic guys feel like their lives were in danger; evening advanced quite far to where it was completely dark, and they still hadn't come back. Maa, in the end, right now they're in front of me eating dinner, though.

"Haa, I was so startled my stomach is empty, ne." (Pel)

Pel, your stomach is always empty.

"No way, to think we caught a glimpse of the Level Ruler... I've heard the rumors, but it's way unbelievable, na. I can brag about it to the President." (Mikene)

"Really, really, it scared me, *wa*." (Suko)

"They say if you beat Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma you can get your hands on some treasure, but I wonder how you'd defeat that thing, na." (Shote)

I agree with Shote. I bet there's no way to defeat that. It's gigantic size is a problem too, but there's no way you can get close to those flames. Even if you try to extinguish the flames with water, then you'd need to splash it with around a whole pond-full of water at once or else it's useless, I bet.

Throwing water from a plastic water bottle would have no meaning, na. It can't be helped that it's all theoretical. I probably don't have a way to fight THAT.

While surrounded by those guys who are sleeping deeply in relief, I continued watching the path that Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma disappeared down.

“You there, don’t go too far on the right. Left, more to the left.”

By Mikene’s instructions, they are carefully carrying my body. Because the ground’s unevenness is terrible, some how or other we’re proceeding by finding level places, even though we’ve been doing this the entire time since morning, when we finally somehow managed to get out of the uneven area, the sky is already beginning to show the sunset.

Today we practically didn’t make any progress at all, but since tomorrow the ground will be flat, our movement speed will increase. If that Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma shows up again, I’ll have to buy time again.

Since we don’t need anymore events other than this for today, I’d like to pass the night in peace.

In the time I was thinking about that, I was also in full operation; one after another they bought my products. I was offering it at quite the low price, but I’m worried about the state of their pocketbooks, na. Come to think of it, the sustenance of their brigade was in danger.

Like always, since their wariness weakens with full stomachs, without leaving a guard they sleep. Maa, since their eyes open as soon as there’s a presence or sound of an enemy, if I make a warning sound, I guess they’ll fly awake.

It’s a quiet night, na. The wide passageway lined with giant walls gives quite the ambience. Since it’s night, the only light is light emitted from my body; if you take a little distance from me, the surroundings are pitch black darkness.

I stand out way too much so let’s extinguish it. Sinking into complete darkness, the only thing I can hear is those guys’ snoring. But, just having someone nearby kind of calms my uneasiness.

If I was flesh-and-blood and truly alone, it wouldn’t be strange if this was a situation where I’d go crazy with fear. Around here, this lonely place would instinctively make you remember fear.

There are abilities that can sense presences, but I bet it’s different than what I think

again ... A, come to think of it, there's an interesting function, na. I'm pretty sure it was somewhere here; found it, found it <Human Presence Sensor>.

When people don't come the entire night, the light shuts off; only when the sensor reacts is when the lights turn on. Aa, but I won't need this, huh? I can make all those decisions and implementations by myself, na.

Maa, I'm looking into all sorts of things, but seeing those guys blissfully sleeping calms me down; whatever will happen will happen. U-n, these guys' close proximity to me gives off the feeling of being my safeguards.

At the least, I should solve the problem of only me being vigilant. In the blank darkness you practically can't see anything, so I distribute my attention to listening just for sounds and, right now, I seem to be able to hear a faint something or other, na.

I search out the direction the noise is in, strain my eyes, and clear my ears. It's a very far off, small sound but it's uninterrupted, and continuously coming. It's like a stove when there's a fire in it.

The sound is ahead a bit, to the left-side. I can't see in the pitch black darkness, but I'm sure that around there was the opening to the branching path.

In the darkness there's a light faintly spilling out. The flickering I see is because it's light from a burning fire, huh? It would be better to make a fuss, na.

"Welcome."

In order not to draw attention from the opponent, I play my recording at a low volum.

"N-, kara'age ... just another twenty pieces..." (assume Pel for anything food related)

"Mikene, Shote ... as male companions, you're going to ... oh no~ you can't~³..." (Suko)

I hear sleep talking. And, from Suko's statement I can sense something 'rotten'; let's pretend I didn't hear anything.

They don't show a hint of waking up. -tte, I can't just leave things like this, so I'll try a little louder.

“We hope to see you again.”

“BUAAAA-! Wh,wh,what the!?”

It's good that Mikene flew awake, but his voice is too loud.

At that yell all members woke up and surveyed the surroundings in a panic. It seems the as of now mysterious light source as also spotted us. As proof, the surroundings it lights up is gradually drawing near.

“Everyone, make your preparations to run from the enemy.”

I don't hate the style to unwaveringly choose not to fight and run away. It's a lot better than the reckless Hunters who don't live long.

What appeared in front of the Demons of Gluttony Brigade that had taken measures to flee was, about the size of an adult human, a skull that was clad in flames.

“A Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon) -. If we don't take care of it with a swift attack, it will call Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon)!”

“W,water! Someone splash it with a huge amount of water!”

So it's that fire skeleton's comrade. If it calls THAT, we'll have no chance of winning. Water, we need water, na.

I quickly drop a 2-liter mineral water into my retrieval opening.

“E, water? The magic tool box dropped out water!” (Suko)

“Our luck is good, na! Suko, give that to me!” (Shote)

Dear Shote, I'd like you to stop categorizing it as luck, though. They still don't think that the vending machine that is I has a consciousness, na. At any time, you're free to make that guess, you know?

Giving up, I drop more water bottles.

All members held two-liter water bottles; it seems difficult for them to unfasten the cap with those claws, so they cut the tops off with their sharp claws.

All members tucked the water bottles into their armpit for the special attack; with a quick movements faster than thinking, they closed the distance and emptied the contents all over the skull.

With four bottles of water poured on it, the skull's flames were completely extinguished; Mikene bit the skull that no longer has anything protecting it and it immediately shattered and was annihilated. With the flames extinguished it's fragile, na.

Until now I hadn't seen an instance where they didn't run away so their true strength was unknown, but their movements were quite fast. They might actually be strong. Looking at their normal behavior, you wouldn't think so.

It's all good that they defeated that Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon), but we're wary of whether or not it called for reinforcements. If that big one comes, they'll have no choice but to flee, na.

Watching for a while to confirm there's no reinforcement, they alternate switching guards. With this, it's a little safer with the watch.

-
1. like pouring water on a hot stone – a futile effort.
 2. actually it's 'back gives out', but in English we say 'legs give out' when we're talking about being unable to move with terror.
 3. One of those 'in Japanese you'd immediately understand the implication, but in English the force of the words is too low' so I messed with the tone a little so you understand why Hakkon immediately thought the 'fu' in fujoshi.

CHAPTER 43

CONVERGENCE

After the chaotic night passed, once again they destroyed a large amount of food and unusually, for them, they began making preparations. Even though usually they would become dull with full stomachs and laze around.

From the experience of that fight, each and every one of the Demons of Gluttony Brigade learned of it, and stuffed their backpacks with mineral water.

“Since we can defeat Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon) if we cover it in water, let’s have each person have one bottle.”

“And, let’s also carry some food. When we have to be apart from this box and our stomachs are empty.”

It’s the food prioritizing Pell, but it’s the right idea so all members nodded and chose products. Kara’age won’t keep, so let’s line up snacks and long-lasting can products.

“This magic box is amazing, ne. When we want to eat kara’age, it puts out kara’age. Right now it’s lining up preserved food. It’s almost like it can understand us, naa.”

Ooo-, Pell, you get it!

So these guys might finally be able to understand that I have a will.

“Welcome.”

“No way, no way. Look, even now it doesn’t say anything other than ‘Welcome.’”

Waving his hand in front of his face, Mikene completely denied it. Dammit, from now on I’m giving out cold kara’age.

Haa, maa, I get it. If I could say “Yes” or “No”, then they might get it eventually, but it’s impossible with “Welcome”, na.

It's not like they're trying to harm me, so for now this is enough, huh? My goal for now is to have them transport me to area around the opening of the maze, and find people from the Seiryu Lake Level.

On that occasion I need to think about what would be good to give as my thanks. But they might be happier if I give them a discount for purchasing things from the vending machine.

"Alright then, today let's give it our best!"

"O-!"

Aa, how soothing. Even though we're in a situation where monsters prowl nearby, just watching the Demons of Gluttony Brigading seems to make me smirk. If I wasn't a vending machine, my face would be something horrible.

As we proceeded with those guys taking turns pushing me, quite far ahead along the course that we're taking, you can see a cloud of dust being raised. Is someone fighting? The distance is much too far so you can't tell whether the targets of interest are human or monsters.

"Guys, it looks like someone's fighting up ahead; what do we do?" (Mikene)

Mikene noticed. All members stopped their feet and stood on tiptoe to look ahead.

"I can't see very well, but it sounds like someone's having a scuffle." (Shote)

"Un un, I also hear it." (Pel)

"It's kind of Hunter-ish, ne. There's a lot of them, too." (Suko ... I think)

I also ... na, I can't hear it. These guys' ears are really good.

"What should we do? Like this, continue and merge, and then help them?" (Mikene)

"If we do that, this magic tool box might get stolen." (Shote)s

“But but, for just us to get out of the Maze Level is going to be tough, na.” (Pel)

“That’s right, ne. Because life’s important. There might be benefits to seeing what happens with negotiations.”

They disagreed a bit, but these guys reached the conclusion that, if the fighting Hunters are hard pressed, then if they cooperate and the Hunters are put into their debt, then it probably won’t go poorly.

“First, I’ll go peek at the situation alone. Check to see whether there’s a possibility of negotiations. Mikene and the others can come slowly, so bring that along and get closer.”

“Understood. You absolutely must be careful, Shote.”

“Leave it to me.”

Shote leapt forward; in the blink of an eye his figure became tiny.

I and the leftover three together progressed forward a little at a time while peering at the situation. Even now you can’t distinguish anything other than the fact that they have arms and legs; I can’t make it out at all.

“The Hunters seem to be the stronger side.”

“Somehow, isn’t there a human who’s raising a weird yell?”

“Un, it’s unintelligible, ne. A woman, na.”

Raising a weird voice while fighting, huh, it’s probably a unique warcry. Hammer-throwing athlete’s also screech meaninglessly as they throw. I’ve heard that if you do that, you add more power into it.

Slowly, slowly we get closer, and a shadow comes towards us at high speed. If you focus your eyes, that is – – Shote, huh?

“O-i, guys, it’s the President! He wants to talk. Come quick!”

“E-, the Hunter President of Seiryu Lake?”

“I wonder why he’s on a lower level.” (Suko)

“But that saves us, ne. If it’s the Bear President he’ll properly hear us out, and he won’t steal treasure that Hunters got for themselves.”

Those guys are talking calmly and having a relieved look on their face, but I’m also at least that relieved. So the Bear President came. I’m saved ... -tte, then Ramis is probably here.

She’ll probably scream and cry again, but I will accept it completely. Since it’s proof that she was worried.

“That’s right. Among the Hunters, there’s a really amazing one. Ha-kooooon; with that mysterious yell, there’s a human Hunter that smashed an Iwa-Jin-Ma (rock-person-demon) with her bare hands.”

Yup, Ramis is accompanying them. Looks like I’ve worried her greatly. Like this, no matter what abuse or sermon she’s going to give, it can’t be helped; I’ll take it obediently.

“You’re lying-. A human can’t destroy an Iwa-jin-ma(rock-person-demon) with her bare hands.”

“No no, it’s true, Pel. And it was even a small-figured woman. I’m pretty sure she was also saying, she’s so worried that she won’t forgive unless she’s allowed one punch, or something.”

... If I use <Barrier> she’ll probably get mad. Is my Defense enough... I should probably raise it more, na.

“Are, didn’t this box suddenly get heavier? It’s getting harder to move.”

“A, un, you’re right, it’s amazingly heavy.”

It’s your imagination.

With feelings of wanting to meet and feelings of not wanting to meet mixed in, those guys continued transporting me towards the fighting.



“E-, Ha-koooooooooon!”

When we had just reached the distance where we could confirm each others’ forms, with good timing, the Hunters’ battle ended. Ramis caught a glimpse of us and, leaping so that she left an imprint in the ground while running, that girl plunged in this direction.

Stepping so hard that you cave the ground in, coming full speed, please stop!
If you put in that much vigor into it, you’re really going to fly-!?

At several meters before me, Ramis spread out both her hands and soared over.
<Barrier> ... no good. To repel a crying girl leaping towards, not as a vending machine, but as a man it’s the lowest.

The option to choose is ... to take it!

Looking at her teary face coming closer and closer, I – – it’s fine, I raised my Defence to 50 so it will be fine. I said to myself.

The heavy sound that filled the area was to the degree that it shook the atmosphere; the shockwave produced by the crash blew away the Demons of Gluttony that were transporting me.

《10 Damage. Endurance has been reduced by 10.》

Guwaaa-. N, no way, I raised Defense all this way and I still took 10 damage!

“Hakkon! DUUUMMMYYYYY-! I believed, I absolutely believed that you wouldn’t be broken!”

《2 Damage. Endurance has been reduced by 2.》

Y, you’ve grown, Ramis. And now, I wonder if you wouldn’t please stop **don don** hitting my body?

I was thinking that I’d like to say something to get her to let go, but on seeing her press her tear-streaked face against me and sob, I made the decision to keep quiet and take it.

Until she’s satisfied, I will accept her feelings.

《3 Damage. Endurance has been reduced by 3.》

This – let’s repair myself.



When she had somehow calmed down and I got out of her vice-like grip, the other people have come up to meet us. It’s a bunch of faces I remember all lined up.

“Dammit, ye worried us. Haaaa, I also believed. That you’d be okay, na.”

Hyurumi hit my frame lightly with a fist. It looks like she had really been worried, but her voice was barely different than her usual.

“Hakkon, we meet again.”

“Somehow you aren’t broken. If Hakkon was broken, we’d be completely troubled you know? As much worry as if you were a beloved girlfriend.”

So the gatekeepers Gols and Karios came to help. As thanks, I’ll ask Ramis to set me near the gate area.

“Hakkon, you saved us. If we weren’t able to find you then...” (Leader)

“It was dangerous ne, White...” (Red)

“That it was, Red...” (White)

The men of the Fools of Whimsy Brigade let out a relieved sigh, and their shoulders drooped. E, that reaction is, exactly what did that mean?

“Hakkon-san, that you’re safe is the best over anything else. When we told Ramis-san that we had left you behind” (Fulmina)

“She approached Leader with an amazingly menacing look; if we didn’t find you, I don’t know what would have happened, ne...” (Shui)

When I heard the explanation from Vice-Leader Fulmina and the archer Shui, I understood.

So the girl sitting at my feet and glaring at me with upturned eyes threatened someone, huh? I’m sorry, I’ve worried you terribly.

“Hakkon. But really, how were you saved? For someone to fall safely from a Level Break, I’ve never heard of it before.”

Even with the wheels the Bear President was staring down at the top of my head, and he asked that question.

It’s true that if you fell from that height, normally it would be instant death. Even I thought that my future as scrap was decided at that time.

“President, President, long time no see!”

The Demons of Gluttony Brigade that had been blown off in the shockwave had all revived at some unknown point, and they were now crowding around the Bear President.

“Oo-, the Big Eater Brigade is all over here, na. On top of finding Hakkon, you protected

him too, huh? I am grateful.”

N? *Are*, the Demons of Gluttony Brigade ... so it’s just a name they call themselves.

“E-, President. What is a Hakkon?”

“It’s not impossible for Mikene to not know. This magic tool box is called Hakkon, a resident of Seiryu Lake.”

“Resident?”

Every member of the Demons of Gluttony Brigade(self-named) aka Big Eater Brigade tilted their ears.

So the Bear President recognizes the vending machine me as a resident. I have been blessed with the people I’ve met since coming to this other world. Dammit, if I get too happy, I’ll probably spring a leak in the vending machine. (aka, cry)

“Aa, a resident. He lives in the Seiryu Lake Level’s community.”

“E, but, this is a convenient magic tool...”

“Aa, I see. So you didn’t realize it yet. Hakkon has a will and is capable of comprehension. Naa, Hakkon?”

“Welcome.”

“But President. Look, it can’t say anything other than ‘Welcome.’”

“Hakkon is limited in what words he can say. ‘Welcome’ is ‘Yes.’ And ‘Too bad’ is ‘No.’”

Since they don’t believe it even after hearing the Bear President’s explanation, the Big Eater Brigade look at me with half-closed eyes.

“Uum, Hakkon, was it? What we the Demons of Gluttony Brigade ate with you was meat kara’age, wasn’t it?”

“Welcome.”

“Uuum, then, that guy’s name is Shote.”

The fat one is Pel, so “Too bad.”

“N,no way. Then, you understand everything we were saying?”

“Welcome.”

Their mouths are open so wide that it looks like their chins are going to fall off, and their eyes are open so wide it looks like they’ll fly out of their sockets.

Maa, these guys didn’t think that it was possible for me to have a will at all.

For those guys who thought a lot of money was going to roll in for them it was quite the shock, so even though the Bear President continued his explanation, it didn’t enter their ears at all.

A, un. After this, I’ll treat them to free kara’age, so I wonder if they’ll pardon me with this.

CHAPTER 44

SEARCH AND DESTROY

“Hakkon, we need to talk. Right now, would you mind?”

Since there isn't much time before evening after we converged, everyone is making preparations for camp near the main pathway; at that time the Bear President called out to me.

A, right, right. About the Big Eater Brigade; they've understood that the Bear President will specially provide a reward, so they ate their fill of kara'age and blissfully went to sleep.

“Welcome.”

On both sides of me is Ramis and Hyurumi; the two of them together bought products from me and finished eating, so they stared over here, watching.

“Aa, I don't mind if those two hear it. This time our greatest objective is Hakkon, the search for your honorable self. This we have accomplished today.”

One way or another, I have received your help. After this, please help yourself to whatever product you would like.

“Leaving like this would be fine, however there was actually another objective for coming to the Maze Level. This is the duty of the Hunter Association's President, and a commission for the Fools of Whimsy Brigade.”

For a commission for the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, I can make some guesses, but as for the duty of the Hunter Association President, what in the world could it be?

“First, regarding the commission for the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, it's the subjugation of the Level Ruler that is Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon). Next, the duty of the President is to investigate the level's abnormalities. The eight-legged-

alligator appeared on the Seiryu Lake Level already, and on this level there were appearances of Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma reported.”

So Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon) was the level ruler. Right before my eyes, it was that intimidating and that overwhelmingly powerful that I can understand. I also understand the abnormalities referred to by the Hunter Association, However, thinking whether the Fools of Whimsy Brigade can defeat THAT is...

“With regards to the Hunter Association, we haven’t thought as far as subjugation, but the balance of the Labyrinth before the Ruler’s appearance has been destroyed, and that the number of Hunter deaths has risen exceptionally is the truth. My true intentions are to subjugate it if possible.”

Certainly, if you encounter THAT, in general you have the two choices of either fleeing or dying, na. The theory of the Bear President, moved into action by other Hunters worried about the safety of their bodies, passes. I think he’s a splendid boss. However, I can’t imagine that the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, who acts on safety first, would undertake such a reckless fight.

“Concerning the Fools of Whimsy Brigade’s objectives, I believe it would probably be best to hear it from the mouths of the ones concerned.”

So saying, the Bear President looked over his shoulder, and behind him Leader and Vice-Leader stood up.

Leader Keryoil lifted his hand lightly in his usual demeanor; Vice-Leader Filmina bowed her head deeply.

“Ya, then I’ll be sitting down, ze.”

“Excuse me.”

When the Bear President swiftly moves to the side, the two sat down in front of me. They’ve concealed their usual playfulness, and with all their concentration they stared at me with unusual seriousness.

“I think you heard from the President, but we want to defeat the Level Ruler. For that

reason, we want to borrow your strength.”

Even though you say that, na. Why; I don’t understand why you want to take such a reckless fight, and in the first place, what kind of expectations are you having for a vending machine?

“Well, saying that so suddenly will trouble you, na. Maa, it’s that, y’know, what we call our brigade, being fools of whimsy, I suppose. It’s that, we ain’t got any plans. We’re truly a brigade of idiots that run towards those whimsies called recklessness.”

His mouth is warped upwards and he’s talking about it in a light tone, but I wonder if it’s my imagination that I see a bitter smile and a tear-stained face. Next to him by his side, Vice-Leader Filmina lowered her eyes and didn’t say anything.

“Those who belong to this brigade have an objective. In order to reach it, we are already prepared to do anything to fulfill it. It might make us fools and idiots; they might call it a stupid whimsy and laugh at us, na. Hakkon, do you know? The legend of the Labyrinth.”

As if I who came from another world would have the opportunity to hear it, so I have no choice but to immediately return “Too bad”.

“Labyrinth ... in other words the Dungeons in various places in the world, when you arrive at the lowest level, for those who satisfy the conditions, no matter what you want, it’s said that one of your desires can be granted. That’s what we’re aiming for. For that, the Coin that falls in the occasion of defeating the Level Ruler is needed ... or so they say.”

Heeeh.... a, that’s, could it be, it’s that Possession I have, the Eight-Legged Alligator’s Coin. That’s, it certainly is worth something. I wonder how much I can get for it if I sell it.

“According to the rumors, it seems that the wishes that will be granted are equal to the number of coins you have. All members of the Brigade members that belong to the Fools of Whimsy Brigade total eight. The twins wish for the same thing, and me and the Vice-Leader wish for the same thing. And so, the number of wishes to be granted

are six. Currently, the number of coins we've acquired is three. It's still not enough. Furthermore, no one has reached lowest level, na."

So, if I use the coin that's hidden inside my body, that means that I can have a wish of mine granted. The dream of becoming a super, high-efficiency vending machine is ... a, no, that's not right. Recently, I've stopped being able to tell how uncomfortable this body is, so I completely forgot, there's the possibility of returning to being a human.

"I heard it from Hyurumi, but it seems like you are a human soul dwelling in this, na. If you cooperate together with us, it's possible that you could be resurrected as a human."

Of course, they've picked up on that. The one who had an excessive reaction to these words wasn't me -- it's Ramis and Hyurumi.

"Is that really true-!?"

"I've seen records similar to that in books, but for Hakkon to be resurrected as a human ..."

Seized by the collar by Ramis and violently shaken back and forth, I can see the afterimages of Leader's head. Filmina-san, don't just watch, stop it, stop it! His head will come off!

"Congratulations, you've won another bottle."

When I shot off a loud recording, Ramis stopped her movements. Leader is slumped over, but it seems like he's still alive so it's okay.

'Whatever you wish for' might be false, but it's another world so it could exist. If I was a person who would cling to the faintest of hopes, then ... this temptation would give off quite the charm.

"Y, you saved me, Hakkon. Maa, calm down. Whichever the case, if we don't reach the last level, then none of it has any meaning. Right now what we're doing is, in order to gain ability, we're going around to each level, and if there's any rumors of Rulers

appearing there, we head over to defeat it. By the way, Hakkon. There's one thing I'd like to ask. You, when you defeated the Eight-Legged-Alligator, did you see a Coin?"

Here I could also lie, but for Leader Keryoil who provided me with valuable information, I'd like to answer honestly.

"Welcome."

"So you saw it. Do you know where that Coin is?"

"Welcome."

His eyes sharpened and a light lit up in his pupils.

Even before he had established their objective, from before I think I can trust them. There's value in being able to use me, so I'm pretty sure they won't doublecross us.

"Could it be ... you have that coin in your possession?"

"Welcome."

"Is that right, then the situation is great. Hakkon and Ramis, join our Fools of Whimsy Brigade ... no, I won't say that you should move with us forever from now on. However, we'd like you to cooperate with us whenever we need to borrow your power during expeditions."

If it's me, I think it would be fine to help them out, but the problem is Ramis. For the Ramis who'd been silent ever since earlier, when all eyes gathered onto her, she smoothly stood up and placed her hand on my body.

And then she smiled gently, and

"Un, we'll cooperate! I want to get stronger too, talk together with Hakkon, and eat his home cooking, ne!"

"Hold on, I'm gonna cooperate too. If it just Ramis, she's gonna be easy to just up and fool."

“We’re grateful. Of course, we’ll welcome Hyurumi too. Then, Hakkon. Are you willing to lend a hand?”

If it’s been done to this point, then there’s only one answer to give.

“Welcome.”

“Is that so! If Hakkon’s here, then our food worries are solved in a flash. Thank you so much!”

“Hakkon-san, thank you very much. With this, even if we run out of food, we won’t end up sucking on monster bones, *desune...*”

Behind the Vice-Leader unnaturally wiping the corners of her eyes, the Red-and-White twins who were there before you knew it raised their fists in the air in great joy. Next to them is Shui, whose entire face is lit up in a smile and smacking her lips.

Seems like we’re being welcomed better than I thought.

“And you know, this time, we didn’t want Hakkon just for food. That said, we ain’t going to leave you in charge of dangerous situations. If it’s not you, no one else can help us capture Honno-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon).”

It’s words with some implications, but it seems like they’ve thought of something. They’re going to explain once it becomes tomorrow, so tonight all members are hitting the hay without pursuing their goals further.

Ramis and Hyurumi are leaning against me to sleep. Haaa, if this was a human body, then I’d be slightly flustered and agitated, but in this situation, I’m thinking it’s good that I have this body of steel, or could I be feeling that it’s a pity; it’s quite complicated.

If I had a sense of touch, I could feel the softness of a girl. Maa, in regards to these two who have faith in me, I should hold back on evil thought.

However, Leader is all fired up to subjugate THAT. I wonder how he intends to do it. And he even said he was going to borrow my power.

The most correct idea would be water, na. But, if we're splashing water at the amount of the water bottles, I don't think it's at the level where that will do it. Does he have some sort of plan... It might be imprudent, but it's a little fun.

I don't know how I'll be helpful, but I'll think of some countermeasures too.

While selling products to the Red-and-White twins standing watch and the two gatekeepers who switched with them, in the middle of the night, I searched for a subjugation method.

"Everyone, I trust you've made your preparations. Then, let's move to that spot. Please look at the map on hand."

Although Shui was triggered by the Big Eaters Brigade and started eating like a fool, things proceeded according to plan, we faced the morning in peace and safety when the Bear President took a breath and called out.

He unrolled the map he had on hand, but how do I say it; the shape is wobbly and the accuracy is poor. Comparing it to the picture of the photo I had taken overhead, I can't even bear to flatter it by calling it an accurate map.

It would be great if I could share the Security Camera image. Umm, how about this? The Points are ... it's quite the expenditure, but I was making a killing with the Big Eaters Brigade so I have quite the amount of Silver Coins saved up, so I guess it's ok.

I choose the <LCD Panel> on the list of Functions. In the time those guys are earnestly looking at the map and discussing it, let's try out this Function.

This LCD Panel is affixed to the front and displays the products without actually lining them up; so it's possible to have a touch panel system to buy things, huh? *Fumu fumu*, is there anything else I've recorded on the Security Camera that I can show?

All I can do is try. First, let's play back the camera as usual so only I can see it. And then, let's strongly will it to be projected on the outside of my body.

Be projected – be projected- be projected-, haaaaa-!

“Aaaa-, why are my girlfriend and my figures here!? W,what is it, a hallucination!?”

The gatekeeper Karios looked to the side and looked my way, so when he saw the picture on the LCD Panel he froze.

『To leave you behind is so painful, my heart will burst ... but this is my job. I'm sorry. 』

『Yes, I also do not wish to be apart from you. However, I don't want to be a hindrance to your work. I will bite back my tears.』

“STOOOoop!”

By the way, televised dead center is a recording of two people's love-love filled video.

So objectively watching is embarrassing, huh? Karios squatted down, head buried in his arms. Understandably, I think he's pitiful, so I switch the picture.

“This is... the Maze Level-! Hakkon, what in the!?”

“It feels like it's from way up in the sky. Could it be ... what Hakkon has seen himself, it's possible for him to project it? If I think it's from in the middle of the fall from when the Level broke, I can understand it.” ¹

It helps that Hyurumi immediately understood and sped the conversation along.

“Welcome.”

“I,I get it too, ne.”

Ramis, it's okay if your competitive fire doesn't burn. The figure of her with her arms crossed is cute and hearwarming, but right now isn't the time for it.

I pause it where you can see the entire Maze and display it on the Panel.

“To think the Maze in its entirety can be clearly shown... Hakkon, this is big. Afterwards, the Hunter Association will add a reward.”

“Filmina, if you please.”

“Understood.”

The Bear President nodded numerous times in admiration. Vice-Leader Filmina took out some paper; on it she drew a picture from the recording.

It would be good if this makes the Maze Level capture a little bit easier.

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1. Strange, no Hyurumi accent in this one. I have certain (personally made) rules for translating Hyurumi, so what doesn't appear doesn't appear.

CHAPTER 45

SECRET PLANS

“Well then, it’s about how to defeat the Level Ruler Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon), but there’s only one idea.”

While being jostled on the comfortable back of Ramis, I turned an ear towards the Bear President’s explanation.

“There’s a large-scale trap in this main road ahead; there are many Hunters who are unaware of the existence of this trap, though; it’s a trap that only activates under specific conditions.”

“I’m pretty sure it was, weight, na.”

Leader Keryoil, who was at the front, purposefully dropped his walking speed and cut into the discussion. He was probably bored.

“That’s right. Exceeding a set weight will invoke the trap ... a large hole opens up. In other words, it’s a pitfall. There is where we would like to arrange to drop Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flame-big-bone-demon).”

To drop THAT in, it must be quite the large hole. If that’s there, it seems like everyone would realize it, though.

“The terrifying part of this trap is that you can’t use a big group of people to push all the way through the level. The main pathway is the Maze Level captures starting point. If there is a place no one is able to pass through, they’re sent tumbling down once enough get on over the set limit.”

“And so, this time’s play isn’t numbers but quality.”

Aa, I see. So that’s why the two gatekeepers are also participating. Because Karios and Gols are talented even among the guards.

“We must defeat the Level Ruler, even more so since Seiryu Lake Level’s Hunters are increasing. There is no problem for Karios and Gols to be absent.”

“They’re people at the level where I’d want to scout them ... it was a joke, President.”

When the Bear President glared, Leader Keryoil shrugged his shoulders lightly.

Seems like it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say those two are the cornerstones of the defense, so the Bear President in charge of Seiryu Lake Level would be troubled if they were head-hunted away.

Honestly, I don’t think he needs to worry about that. At the least, I bet Karios won’t leave the Level. I glance and give the aforementioned person a look.

“When this matter is finished, my girlfriend will throw me a welcome home party. Maaan, to be so loved is a tough thing!”

What the hell are you saying, beaming smiles with your whole face. That ‘skinhead’s¹ stern face is melting. As long as she’s there in Seiryu Lake, Karios will continue to be there as a gatekeeper. This time is an exception among exceptions; I need to express my thanks.

Next to that Karios is Gols, hitting his forehead with his hand and heaving a sigh. As always, thanks for your hard work.

“The pitfall spot should be around here. Everyone draw close to the left-side wall. About to where your back is pressed against it.”

All members obediently obeyed him, lining up with their backs against the wall. The Bear President alone proceeded ahead along the wall, prodded the wall with his hand and for some reason a rumbling sound occurred. After a bit, he nodded once very largely and checked over here.

When he did that, just when I thought there was an earthquake, on the ground, one crack, running straight ahead, opened up and it split in two. Only the place where we were along the wall was left; the entire ground splendidly vanished.

The giant square hole that suddenly appeared, measured by eye, could completely fit a 25 meter pool. The hole's deep bottom is unable to be seen. Peering over the edge, only a black abyss can be seen.

"The rim has a slope like a mortar, so everyone take care. I want you to properly memorize the position of the hole. Right now I'm forcing the trap to activate, but normally if just all of us are on it, the pitfall won't open ... though I'm not sure about Hakkon."

'Cause I'm heavy. But then, I think the Bear President is also something of the same proportion.

Once again he did something or other and the ground cover slowly closed up.

"For now, proceed without touching the ground that was opened right now. Let's go over the outline of the plan we explained just a bit ago."

The form of each and every member of the Big Eaters Brigade, now knowing the depth of the hole, staring at the ground fixedly as they moved ahead with a timid feeling, once again they're so cute. When they're not intimidating, they're soothing characters.

At a place a little removed from the hole, we all sat in a circle; it seems that this time it's Leader Keryoil's turn to give the explanation.

"Right then, now that we reunited with Hakkon, we'll give the detailed explanation. The depth of that hole just then is about two times Honoo-Kyo-Hone-Ma (flames-big-bone-demon). We plan to lure that guy to on top of that hole and drop him, but even if it goes well and he falls, it's doubtful that THAT will destroy him. With adding an attack on top of the hole, we could completely extinguish the hellfire its body is clad in. For that, with Vice-Leader's water-type magic and Hakkon providing water, I think we can fill that hole with water.

I see. So that's why I'm needed.

If you extinguish the flames then when it, like Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flames-rook-head-demon), is laid to bare bone, then you can deal damage, huh? If you submerge it

like that in water, then certainly there's a possibility that the fire will be extinguished, but I wonder how many hours it would take to fill that hole with water. If it's to the degree of the water in the water bottles, then I don't know how many days it would take.

I've heard that it takes half a day to fill a school pool full of water. If I consider the depth of that big hole it's several tens times bigger. If it's done normally it will be a labor that causes you to lose interest.

"Just asking if it's impossible, but ... Hakkon, are you not able to sell water in large amounts, or perhaps somehow able to spray it out?"

All members' gazes converged on me. Even with their expectant gazes on me, I'm a little bothered. If it's vending machine's water, then mineral water is sold. I'm pretty sure it's in the list of Functions. However, at that degree of water flow, how long would it be to satisfy THAT.

Water, water, huh ... at the present, if I combine all the Functions I've acquired so far, won't some tail-end of a thread of an idea come out?

Oh yeah, if I pour ice in with the newly acquired <Ice Vending Machine>, it might fill more quickly than pouring water in.

Then, the coin-operated vacuum has no relation, huh? Although it's helpful at a self-carwash... n? Self carwash, huh? Which means, THAT can be chosen.

Yosh, recently I think I've been spending too many points, but a vending machine is supposed to be useful to its customers. Let's add this Function.

Once I selected this choice, let's change my body. The vending machine's width changed to several times its size, and a number of buttons appeared. At the side, a hard, black hose is installed, and at its tip, a nozzle with a lever that resembles the kerosene measurer appeared.

"This is, it's another form I haven't seen, but. Hakkon, this is your answer, I supposed."

"Welcome."

I immediately reply to Leader Keryoil's question. Normally, I'd be doubtful whether they could figure out the way to use it, but this time Ramis and Hyurumi are here. If it's those girls, they can manage somehow; I have faith in them.

"Scuse me a bit. There's a lot of parts that stick out, and like when ya buy stuff, when you push it, that means there'll be some kind of reaction."

"Hyurumi, there's some kind of pretty picture drawn on it – isn't it the way to use it?"

For Hyurumi, who investigates one step at a time, Ramis pointed it out with her finger.

That's right, this type has a number of courses; the price and the procedure to use it is depicted in photos. If she sees this, Hyurumi with her high comprehension ability will probably understand.

"Heeeh – what ya got? So the girl squeezes here and water comes out-! Hakkon, ya mind if I give it a whirl-!?"

Guess I don't have a reason to refuse Hyurumi, approaching with her eyes glittering with fire.

"Welcome. Please insert the coins."

Recently I've been doing a lot of free charity work, so this time I appealed for money. In the end the ones who will be paying will probably be the Fools of Whimsy Brigade, so there's no problems there, I guess.

"O-, then I'll pay. Vice-President, if you would."

"How you don't pull it out of your own wallet is very much like Leader."

Vice-Leader Filmina pulled a gold coin out of her wallet and inserted it. With my whole body brimming with power, I conveyed that the preparations have been made.

"Yosh, the preparations be done. Push this switch, point it in a direction where there

ain't no people, and pull the lever!"

The water that flew out of the tip with great force, when it hit the wall the spray splashed everywhere. Because it was a force greater than she thought, Hyurumi was pushed a step backwards.

"This be SWEET. If it a Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon), then this is more than enough to extinguish it."

She seems to be having fun, and sprayed the water on the top of the wall, back and forth, and began washing the dirt off.

Watching this is Ramis and the Big Eaters Brigade's Pel and Suko. The Fools of Whimsy Brigade's Shui, and the twins jealously crowded around her. They have the pure eyes of children with a toy in front of them.

"Behind me, wait ya turn."

To Hyurumi who acts like she's talking to children, they said, "O-kay!" and gathered together to wait. Using this pressure-washer to wash cars is honestly quite fun. Previously I used the automated car wash, but after knowing the fun of washing it myself, I chose the self wash all the time.

"If it's an amount of water to this degree, filling it with water isn't going to be a ridiculous story. You've saved us, Hakkon!"

It's not a bad feeling to be recognized by Leader Keryoil, but it wouldn't be strange if even this amount of water would take days ... no, a week. Like this, even if I kept it going the entire time, will things carry on well?

And further, would this really decide it? My doubts and uneasiness are endless, but if this is the best plan, then I can't just not do it. I'll put out all my power.

A-, *iya*, hang on a second. Form changes can only be two hours for one day ... what should I do?

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Two days have passed.

With one person acting as a lifeline just in case, the trap is activated by triggering the mechanism and the big hole is purposefully opened; I passed the time by single-mindedly poured in water everyday.

Although I said that, in the end, in case of unexpected accidents, I'm only the pressure-washer for one hour a day, and afterwards I continue to drop 2 liter mineral waters.

At first they opened the bottle and poured out the contents onto the slanted part, but just once, I tossed a water bottle; the girls watched the water inside spill out and immediately understood. Now they're hurling the water bottles into the hole.

During this, Yuta-Buta-Ma (abundant-pig-demon) and moving skeletons came out many times, but moving against the members of this collection of talented people is reckless; they're repulsed in no time at all.

When a Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon) appears, Ramis puts me on her shoulder, and the person who was previously decided on to be in charge of the hose draws close and happily blasts them with water.

With just this volume of water the flames are erased in no time at all, so it seems to be fun to be in charge when a Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon) appears, so it's quite envied.

"I'm going to look to see how much water has collected. Keep a firm grasp on the lifeline."

The light-bodied Mikene wrapped the lifeline around his stomach, and his comrades slowly lowered him into the hole. It feels like quite a lot has been collected, but who know how it is in reality.

After a little bit, Ramis fished Mikene back up, and he gave the report to the Bear President.

"The hole is extremely cold, like the middle of winter, but the ground looks like it has good drainage and the water is dispersed; it hasn't collected at all."

“Unuu, I see.”

“I thought it was a good idea ... dropping it in the pitfall should still be valid, but we’re going to have to rework it.”

The Bear President and Leader Keryoil looked at each other and groaned.
So the drainage was good. –tte, in that case, I might have something I want to try.

“O, Hakkon, what ya changing for all of a sudden? This is, aa, I see. If it’s cold, then drop ice instead o’ water, huh?”

That’s how it is. It’s just an hour a day, but it’s better than doing nothing. And, having raised my speed, it’s not even worth comparing to the speed I dropped ice from before.

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1. skinhead – means a bald tough guy in Japanese, with no “racist” connotation.

CHAPTER 46

EXTINGUISHING FIRE

From then on, every day, when it became late in the night, I changed forms and dropped large amounts by myself. My speed was increased, so it flowed down in forceful waves.

Because the inside of the hole is quite cold, it hasn't melted at all; that's what Mikene, who dangled in the hole in order to check, said.

At my drop opening, Hyurumi has installed a wooden slide like thing, so it falls into the hole without clogging up.

Doing it late at night is because there's the two hours per one day limit, so if I do it on the last two hours of the day, the day will pass and the Form Change time limit immediately resets.

Even so, late-night work is fundamentally work done alone. Ramis and the others said they would get up to be with me, but I politely refused. If you're going to do that, then doing it in the usual night-watch way is enough, see.

If Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flames-big-bone-demon) has the same traits as Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flames-rook-head-demon), then if the fire part is extinguished, attacks will go through. But, if it's just to the degree of water and ice, then it doesn't feel like it (water and ice) will do anything other than evaporate in an instant.

"Hakkon, are you thinking about something?"

I've changed back to the original vending machine as the day changed, and from behind Ramis popped her head out.

But man, I wonder how she can tell I'm mulling something over? Even though I should be the usual, unchanging vending machine.

“I don’t think you noticed, but when you’re thinking about something, the light flickers and gets a little dimmer.”

Is that so. I totally didn’t notice at all. You’re really observant, Ramis.

“Hakkon, can I ask you something?”

It’s rare that her smile vanishes, and her gaze is earnestly seeping into me. It seems like it’s not a scene where I could poke fun at her or play dumb here.

“Welcome.”

“Does Hakkon want to return to being human?”

That’s a difficult question. Normally one would think about not being a vending machine and returning to being a human, I guess. Here is a vending machine maniac, so normal is...

At first I also wished to return to being human. The wish to be able to return to being a human and trade words with Ramis is here even now. But, I realized it. The me who returns to being human and is no longer a vending machine – is there any benefits?

Right now I am aware I’m useful to Ramis and the others. However, returning to being a human means returning to a common me without this benefit.

Thinking about that is frightening. I would probably be happy that I returned to being a human at first. However, my usefulness is widely known, so everyone would be happier during the time when I was a vending machine ... I can see that future where every mouth would be saying that.

And then, even if I learn <Telepathy>, at the time when I have a conversation with her, I’m beginning to have a sense of uneasiness of whether I’d disillusion her. For me, whose mouth wasn’t that well-versed when I was a human, can I have a good enough conversation to satisfy her and the others? If I try to talk to them, then I might only disillusion them as being an uninteresting man.

And that's why, at that time, I might have unconsciously avoided taking <Telepathy>. Right now like this I can make the bare minimum communication, sticking that kind of 'it's enough' reasoning to it, I let go of the chance to talk to the girls myself. It's shameful, na. To have more confidence in the vending machine I am now than as a human.

"Congratulations. You have won another bottle."

"You don't really know? Me, one day I want to be able to talk with Hakkon and do all sorts of things together. A, I said it before though, but I want to eat your home cooking too!"

If I had arms, I can also hug this girl who's smiling without a care in the world. If I had legs I could, instead of being carried on her back, walk side-by-side together with her.

Just that is more than enough, na. If that's what she wishes, I will make making it work my goal. No matter what the result may be.



After several more days passed, with quite a bit being stored up inside of the hole, it seems like it was time to focus on the plan. The plan's rough outline is, first to locate Honoo-kyou-hone-ma (flame-big-bone-demon) and lead it to this pitfall.

And we'll call Honoo-kyou-hone-ma (flame-big-bone-demon) over with the covering on top of the pitfall. And when it's gotten on top of the pitfall, we'll activate the trap and drop it in, and on top of the fire going out, we'll add attacks onto it; that's about the extent of it.

For that reason, there's a ton of small rocks in the cart. That's the declaration of war from Ramis.

It's just, it feels like the rocks aren't that big. For Ramis, she'd be able to grab and lift much bigger rocks, but the cart-boar can't withstand that kind of weight so it seems that there's no rock of that handy large size.

It's difficult to say anything without giving it a try. As long as the opponent that falls

into the hole can't climb out, the dangerousness is reduced. Just that, though, will give the attacking side an advantage, I think.

"Leader, looks like Red's come into contact with a Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flames-rook-head-demon)."

"Righto, like that, lead it over here."

With his hand to his ear, White explained what was going on to Leader Keryoil. I think, if I remember right, the Red-White twins' unique Divine Protection was, no matter how far apart they were, limited to the two of them, it was possible for them to transmit others' voices.

Although it's only limited to the two of them, it's a convenient ability, na. Well yeah, Leader also uses them conveniently.

"Just like you heard. We're waiting for a little ways away from the hole. We've asked Mikene to move into position with a hood on and mantle wrapped around him."

"Understood."

Completely wrapped up in a mantle the same color as the wall, Mikene is established in front of the pitfall's activation switch. When he turns his back, it looks like he assimilates into the wall; it's likely that if you don't look carefully, you wouldn't realize he's there.

We are all waiting at the wall facing the hole. Now it's just buying time until the Level Ruler is called, and then implement the plan.

"Hakkon, be honest with me. How do you see this? Ya think this plan's gonna be a hit?"

Hyurumi brought her mouth close to me and muttered.

I think this kind of thing depends on the luck of the moment, but her intent isn't for me to tell her if it will go well or not; she just wants me to say that it will go well.

"Welcome."

"I see. For me too, I want to think that it be a hit. But ya know, there's rumours about Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma havin' enough firepower to instantly evaporate water. Who knows what will happen to an amount of ice that satisfies that hole..."

Aa, I see. What Hyurumi is worried about is that, huh? I want to clear away her worries, but I don't have the techniques to do that.

"Pretty soon, Red is going to be here!"

"We Fools of Whimsy Brigade will take the role of waiting on top of the hole. For the love of god, don't let go of the lifeline!"

"Leave it to me, Leader-san!"

"You can rest assured."

The ends of the lifelines wrapped around their waists are being clutched by Ramis and President Bear. And Leader's lifeline is wrapped around my body. I wonder what would happen if I form changed ... I'm curious, but let's exercise some self-restraint.

Red leaped out from a side-path, and from behind him, three Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flame-rook-head-demon) are floating and chasing him. So he was able to lure out this many.

"I'm going to make it look like I'm having a somewhat tough fight between two of them and barely defeat them. The one left over is up to you guys."

"Roger!"

The Fools of Whimsy Brigade leapt out with vigor. Those guys' abilities don't fall behind a Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flames-rook-head-demon), so I can watch without worrying.

Actually, they have more than enough ability to leisurely deal with them, so now we only have to wait for the one we want to appear. When there was only one left, with

that one as well being slowly whittled away, from the ground there came a sense of faint oscillations.

Looks like it's the actual arrival of the guest of honor. At the place where the side-path connects, I can see that the air is wavy. The phenomenon from extreme heat, no doubt.

"A-iright, you guys know what to do!"

"Hai!"

They immediately defeated the last Honoo-Hi-Atama-Ma (flames-rook-head-demon), and the Fools of Whimsy Brigade took up positions on the middle of the pitfall. The place all members' gazes were collected on was the giant skeletal hand clad in crimson flames. And then, with a heave, a flame clad skull came up from near the top of the wall.

"So at this range, it's already this hot."

Hyurumi wiped the sweat from her forehead, motionlessly glaring at Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flames-big-bone-demon). Everyone's expressions are stiff. It's understandable; after all giant skeleton alone is bizarre, but within it is heat that can melt the wall.

"It would be better if we stepped a bit further back."

President Bear, with Ramis and Hyurumi, stood back a bit further.

The Fools of Whimsy Brigade have also begun moving back, as if they're frightened of their opponent, but they seem to have the leisure to glance at their feet.

When it takes a step, just like last time the ground sinks in into the same shape as its skeletal foot. Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma should be slowly walking forward with its dull movements, its walking speed increased; right now it's already doubled its pace.

The intensity of Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma approaching while simultaneously melting the ground and causing tremors isn't normal at all; if you look at it objectively, the despair wouldn't be half-assed.

“We got him! Everyone run through!”

The Fools of Whimsy Brigade are truly running like crazy for their lives as the fire skeleton drew closer. It swung its arm about but it didn’t even come close; even so the hot wind that was stirred up violently ruffled their hair.

“Hoooooot! The heat, the heat!”

“Leader, please complain afterwards.”

“Covering just yourself with water is cheating, Vice-Leader!”

“Don’t you have no heart to care for your subordinates-?”

“Water over here too!”

Hearing their screams, I turned my eyes to the Vice-Leader, and certainly she’s coated herself entirely in water. Accordingly, she was the only one with a calm face.

Whatever you say, it looks like they have the room to flap their lips, na.

They left the pitfall area followed by Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flames-big-bone-demon), and when it approached,

“Now, Mikene!”

“OK!”

President Bear yelled, like he was howling, and Mikene who was camouflaged to the wall, activated the trap.

With the ground underfoot disappearing, Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flames-big-bone-demon), with an outstretched hand, disappeared from sight.

“Guys, the steam’s gonna come billowing out! Don’t get close to the hole yet!”

At Hyurumi’s loud yell, the feet of those guys moving closer to check inside stopped. But, when the steam didn’t billow out no matter how long they waited, all eyes

gathered on Hyurumi.

“A,are? The water should evaporate but ... what’s this mean?”

Unable to understand, Hyurumi groaned with folded arms.

Seemingly unable to withstand his curiosity, Mikene near the wall timidly peeped in.

“Everyone-, the skeleton’s fire is out!”

“I don’t get it, but if it’s out that’s all that matters! Commence the throwing!”

With Leader Keryoil’s order as the trigger, everyone began to through giant stones.

Why the fire was extinguished is something that probably I alone know about in this place. What I dropped into the pitfall wasn’t ice, actually – it was dry ice.

Dry ice is carbon dioxide hardened into a mass, so when Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma fell in and the dry ice melted, the hole was filled with carbon dioxide.

From here it’s content from elementary school science, but if there’s no oxygen then fire won’t burn, and carbon dioxide is heavier than oxygen so it collects at the bottom. In other words, that is why that thing’s fire went out.

This is something to be happy about that it went well; if it was a blunder, I would not be able to stand it. It was something I did with my own judgment, so honestly I’m really relieved.

Now then, like this, if they can defeat it with nothing else happening that would be the best, but. While watching they drop stone after stone, I hoped for such a thing.

CHAPTER 47

THE FINAL BLOW

“Mikene, how’s the situation?”

Leader Keryoil asked Mikene, who was peering into the hole.

“To some degree, it looks like we’ve given it some serious wounds, but it feels like one more attempt won’t be enough.”

So it’s at the degree where rocks won’t be able to decide it, huh? If only we had some heavier, hard object, then we might be able to ... n? Why is everyone staring at mineself, I wonder.

“If it’s Hakkon it’d do it, right?” (Leader)

“No, but, if we screw this up, Hakkon will be broken.” (V-Leader)

“He’s still alive after falling from the Level Break, so it’ll be fine, right?” (Leader)

Leader-san and Vice-Leader-san. Please stop having such a dangerous conversation right in front of the person himself, ne. But, honestly speaking, if I change into the giant vending machine and fall on it, that does seem to be the most effective-ish way, na.

“NO! Don’t make Hakkon do dangerous things!”

“It ain’t even a sure thing it’ll work. I’m also gonna be against.”

As if to cover me, Ramis and Hyurumi lined up in front of me. I’m happy for their feelings, but if we can’t come to a decision, then I have enough room to give this plan a thought.

If I raise my Defense up enough, even if I fall it feels like it should be okay. Since I can use Points to repair myself as long as my Endurance doesn’t become 0, I was thinking

I could do it, though. But, if I screw it up, then that would be the end.

“That’s right, na; Hakkon has already been more than helpful enough. If we force more than this on him, it would be too much. It won’t do for us not to show off our good sides too, na.”

“Do we jump in and do it in immediately?”

“That’s true; without the bothersome flames, then we can manage it...”

E-, nonono, that’s what you can’t do!

The bottom is filled with carbon dioxide. If they go down they’ll have trouble breathing, or like, they’ll die of carbon dioxide poisoning.

This was not what I was expecting. No matter what we do, them going down is the only thing that must absolutely be avoided.

“Welcome Welcome Welcome!”

“O-, Hakkon also agrees, huh?”

WRO—NG!

“Too bad Too bad Too bad!”

“Wrong, huh? But, if we don’t hurry –“

“The bones are trying to climb up the wall!”

Since it doesn’t have any reason to obediently wait in the hole, na. So of course it will try to climb. We’re running out of time even more. Even despite that, there’s no way people should go down into the hole.

“We can’t let this change get away. You guys, are you prepared?!”

“Please don’t let go of the lifelines, ne!”

“Seriously, we’re begging you!”

“Seriously, we’re not joking even one bit!”

These types of times where they’re prepared to give it their all are worthy of respect, but right now it’s going in a really bad direction. No good, like this, they’ll is there something, is there any way to stop them!

Where I am right now is a spot a little ways away from the hole. I’m still three meters away from the part of the pitfall that has a slope. Near me are Ramis and Hyurumi. And, the rest of the Big Eaters Brigade other than Mikene, huh?

Leader unwound the lifeline from around my body and handed it over to President Bear. I guess because this was a time where it was important to be able to control the length.

Is there some way or other to get my body over to the slanted part? First let’s secretly install the wheels to my bottom. Now it seems like I just need a push to make it.

Even if I had a way to convey it to Ramis, there’s no way she would nod her head yes, I guess. Hyurumi as well, from how the situation went earlier, won’t work. If that’s how it is, it’s President Bear or maybe the Big Eaters Brigade.

If I have the Big Eaters Brigade push, they’d have to put all their power in combined or it would be useless; President Bear has been entrusted with the lifeline, so both his hands are occupied. Even though it looks like, with Ramis’ super-strength, a light push would be more than enough to move me to the slope.

A- ... there is one way I can think of. It’s just, if I put this into practice, the shame, all my respectability would be thrown away. It’s for the sake of victory; having my favorability drop a little is way better than letting them die.

I form change and select – Porn-Magazine Vending.

“E, Hakkon, changing so suddenly ... E-, eeeee-!?”

Facing the glass, I lined up voluptuous women taking up suggestive poses; you can’t

see them as doing anything but seducing men.

When Ramis saw them, her face became dyed in red.

“He-, e-, why are these people, in underwear, pushing out their butts and raising their chests ... uwaaa!”

She’s looking at it shyly, but at the same time eating it up. It’s the feeling of being embarrassed yet still having interest, na. I understand your feelings, Ramis.

Wait, this isn’t the time to be thinking Ramis’ embarrassed look is *moe*. I push her more here.

“Welcome.”

“He-awawa-! N,no way, geez, Hakkon. I wouldn’t buy this, geez, you pervert¹!”

Having let out her voice when it was a time everyone needed to concentrate, in order to cover up her agitation, Ramis, who stood out with her excessive over-reaction, hit my body with an open palm.

If it was normal there would have only been a light sound, but because she was agitated, she made a mistake in holding back her strength and a splendid shock went through my body.

And, the shock sent the vending machine sliding sideways. If I didn’t have the wheels out, it would have been at the degree that it shook my body, but it was way more power than necessary for the me right now.

“E-, Hakkon!?”

“Thank you very much.”

The flustered girl’s hand stretched out but that hand only grasped empty air, so I approached the slope, my speed increased, and I flew into the hole.

When I felt the sensation of floating in the air, at the same time I changed into the giant vending machine.

Glancing downwards, I fixed my gaze on the form of the skeleton climbing up the hole. It was in a situation where it would fall if it let go with one hand, and from directly overhead fell a vending machine.

It let go with one hand to either try to flick me away, or otherwise catch me. That moment of hesitation was fatal for Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma (flames-big-bone-demon). In the end it was unable to decide which to do, and the vending machine lightly smashed into the skull that took the blow with its forehead.

It was good luck that I hit it on just the right angle. My body that destroyed the skull shattered the throat, ribs, and hipbone as it crashed into the ground.

《12 Damage. Endurance has been reduced by 12.》

It was less damage than I thought; probably, having smashed into the bones, my falling speed sharply dropped.

About one-third of my body was caved in by the ground and was misshapen, but the result was good so everything's good.

From above the fragments of bone came *clatterclatter* showering down. That was properly the final blow, na. With this, everything's a-ok.

"Hakkooooon! You're being reckless agaaaaain-! I'm coming right now, so wait just a minute!"

Ramis-san has become angered again. It just happened, but she's going to come down immediately. -tte, this place is full of carbon dioxide, so let's change into the oxygen vending machine and put out oxygen.

"Too bad Too bad Too bad"

To keep her from coming closer I repeatedly call out "Too bad", but she's refusing to listen so a rope comes dangling from above. Let's put out oxygen at high speed!

My constant "Too bad" call shows results; it seems that Ramis is hesitating to descend. It seems like the others around her stopped her, though.

“Hakkon! Ya mean that right now it’s dangerous down there?!”

“Welcome”

I immediately respond to Hyurumi’s question. For scenes like this, I’m grateful for her existence. Ramis also manages to make good guesses, but when I’m endangered, she gets reckless.

Her concern is something to be happy about, but I wish she’d be a little more concerned about her own self. –tte, it’s not like I can talk about other people.

Come to think of it, I defeated another Level Ruler, so isn’t there a coin that’s fallen somewhere around here? O-, there it is, there it is. Like before, I use the <coin-operated vacuum> and somehow manage to control it to suck up the coin.

In the Possessions column, <Coin of Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma> has been added, na.

And now I just have to keep putting out oxygen ... –tte, oxygen is lighter in weight than carbon dioxide, so it won’t collect in the bottom of the hole, huh? That said, how about I show them how I returned from the Level Break?

I made a large amount of balloons, and *poof*, keeping them within my barrier, I became the <Cardboard Vending Machine>. My body became enveloped by a sensation of floating, and I *float, float* soar upwards.

Like this, because I’m in a bunch of carbon dioxide, it’s easy to float due to the relationship of their specific weights. I’m rising to the surface with more force than I thought.

Approaching a little above halfway, my speed dropped. So it was only full of carbon dioxide to here, na. If I make way more balloons than before, then I will somehow float my body to the top.

“Uum, Hakkon?”

“Welcome”

I was worried about whether my voice would come out since my body is cardboard, but that seems to be alright. Maa, the other vending machines didn't have the ability to playback my voice recordings, but I spoke with them.

"Mikene, close the hole."

"Understood."

At President Bear's order, the pitfall's lid shot, and so I dismissed <Barrier>, released the balloons, and made a landing. And, returning back to the usual vending machine, I let out a breath of relief ... and a shadow fell on my body.

I have a bad feeling, and I don't want to look over, but I can't just play dumb either, so although I don't want to, I look up in front of me.

Leaning forward with her hands on her hips and her cheeks puffed out, it's Ramis. Un, no mistake, she's mad.

"Hakkon. Exactly what would you have done if you were broken?"

That gentle voice is contradictorily terrifying.

"Congratulations! You have won so choose another bottle"

"Don't try to play it off. Imma plenty mad ya know."

Ku-, when her emotions swell up, her original dialect comes out. Let's just be good and listen here.

In the first place, I don't have the talent of the art of talking to women, and with this recorded sound data, nothing I say will be of any use, I bet. After thinking such, I realized my shallow way of thinking, when her sermon finished an hour later.

At the beginning she was angry, but it eventually switched to complaints about exactly who would be worried, and if it weren't for Hyurumi, who was watching, stopping it, she would have continued.

“Ramis, leave it there. If ya gonna keep blamin’ him so much, Hakkon will start hating you.”

“Au-. Then, I’ll leave it here. *Mou*, don’t do such reckless actions again, ne.”

To her request, I responded with silence. I don’t want to lie to her. And so, I won’t respond at all. If we run into a scene where I need to save everyone, I’d probably do the same thing yet again, after all.

To the me who took that kind of attitude, instead of becoming angry, Ramis smiled a bitter smile. It’s like, she could read what I was thinking and is exasperated by it or something.

“Is your discussion over? I have something I want to ask, but is that okay?”

He was probably just waiting for this timing to talk; Leader Keryoil stepped up as his fingers crawled along the brim of his hat.

“Thanks for your help this time too. Hakkon, did the Level Ruler’s coin fall at the bottom of the hole?”

“Welcome”

“O, I see. Then, we’ll have to go and get it later, na.”

I should present the coin I retrieved, huh? Uuum, how do I do that? Looking at the <Coin of Honoo-Kyou-Hone-Ma> under Possessions, and then imagine putting it outside.

“Oo-, so you picked it up!”

The coin fell in front of us in good condition. Without wavering, Leader went to pick it up, but from the side a hand stretched out and skillfully snatched it.

“What are you doing, Hyurumi?”

“You acting like it be obviously yours, but the one who defeated Honoo-Kyou-Hone-ma and the one who picked it up is Hakkon, right? It ain’t yours.”

It’s a sound argument, but I don’t really care either way. But, maa, this is beyond what I’m used to; it might be better to do this properly, na.

“Aa, my bad. It’s true that you played a huge part in this somehow. There’s no question that the one who earned it was Hakkon. And so, I’d like to buy this. How’s one hundred gold coins?”

This isn’t a sum of money that should be said with such a light, carefree tone, na. A hundred gold coins exchanged would be 100,000 points. –tte, ain’t it a ridiculous amount of money?

Ramis is as surprised as me, so with wide-opened, round eyes she’s looking alternatively at the coin and me.

Hyurumi doesn’t seem to be particularly surprised; she glances at President Bear who had changed into a witness.

“Fumu. It’s the market price for a Level Ruler’s coin, so that much should be right.”
(P.Bear)

“So he says, Hakkon. What are you gonna do?”

If it’s like that, then there’s no problem and it’s enough. I’ve already secured a Level Ruler’s coin, so I don’t need any more.

“Welcome”

“As expected of Hakkon. That the deal went through quickly helps. Don’t mind that I’ll be paying the money at a later date. It ain’t possible to always carry around such large amounts of money, na.”

The negotiations end and the coin becomes his. Leader Keryoil lifts the coin to light over his shoulder, and after he carefully looked at it, he stuffed it in the bag at his waist.

No-w then, all that’s left is to return me to Seiryu Lake Level. It looks like it will end

without me knowing the Maze Level aside from in the sky and the main path, but there probably won't be any reason for me to come here a second time, I guess.

1. sukebe, not hentai – hentai means someone who has left the right path, which is why it's a stronger insult than sukebe (which is why pedos, molesters, etc are often called hentai), and hentai can be used for perversion of other things other than sexual things (though, nowadays it's used most often for sexual perversion). Sukebe is more saying the person is too into sexual things. Basically (at least, in this instance), Ramis isn't really MAD at Hakkon about suddenly being shown porn, she's more embarrassed than anything, and that's why she uses kind of playful language and doesn't call him a hentai. (although, imo, showing porn unexpectedly to a young girl and thinking her embarrassed look is cute is kind of going off the wrong path, Hakkon...)
2. Of course, sukebe can also be a strong insult depending on context.



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